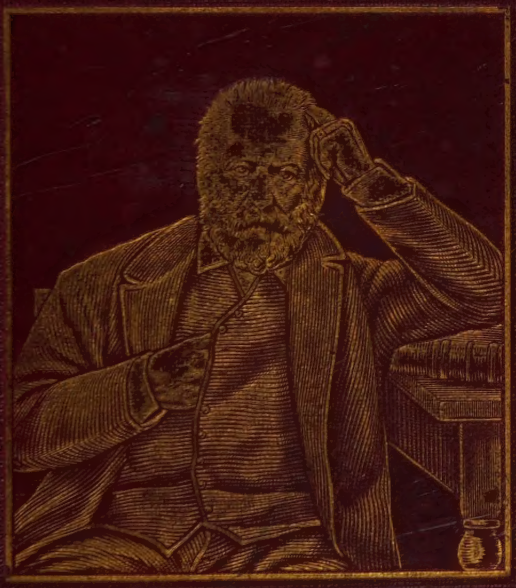
VICTOR HUGO

HIS LIFE AND WORK



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Victor Hugo.

VICTOR HUGO

HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY

A. F. DAVIDSON

AUTHOR OF

"THE LIFE OF ALEXANDER DUMAS"

LONDON

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1912

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PREFATORY NOTE

All lovers of literature will share the deep regret of Davidson's many personal friends that this is a posthumous work.

French literary history was always his hobby. Soon after he left Oxford—he was a scholar of Keble and graduated in 1883—he began to make an abridged translation of the *Memoirs* of Dumas, devoting his evenings to the task at a time when he held the headmastership of one of our small north-country grammar schools. He published the translation, and it went out of print. I think it was my friend Mr. Morris Colles who then persuaded him to undertake a Life of Dumas, in view of the approaching centenary. At all events, he did undertake it, and achieved a popular as well as a literary success; and he further made himself known by a series of articles on French literary subjects, contributed to *Macmillan's Magazine*. Of one of these, dealing with Prosper Mérimée's *Lettres à une Inconnue*, I have a specially vivid recollection as a brilliant and incisive piece of work.

He would have liked, I think, to follow up his Life of Dumas with a Life of Mérimée, in whose personality he took a peculiar interest, attested by many passing allusions in the present volume. He doubted, however—and publishers also doubted—whether the subject would prove attractive to English readers; and he put the project aside and determined to write of Victor Hugo instead. The pressure of other work interposed some delay; and he did not actually begin the biography until he was in the grip of his last, long illness.

My interest in the subject was almost equal to his; and we often discussed it together—agreeing on most points, and agreeing to differ on others. Our last talk about it took place in the summer of 1911, at Bonchurch, where he was staying in the hope of recovering his health. He was lying in a low chair in a beautiful garden in that beautiful suburb of Ventnor. The sheets of the manuscript which is now on my table were strewn on the grass beside him. He was trying to put the final touches to it; and he talked of returning to town, and seeing it through the press.

But that, alas! was not to be. His illness took an unfavourable turn soon after the day on which we parted on the Portsmouth platform; and I have been asked to read the proofs, and to edit them if I found that they required editing, so that the book may reach the public in the form in which the author would have wished it to be presented to them.

There was not a great deal to be done, and I have been anxious to do nothing which could be regarded as superfluous. My aim has been, in short, to revise the proofs as Davidson would himself have revised them: nowhere tampering with any expression of opinion, but carefully correcting obvious slips of the pen, removing the few redundancies which he would have seen to be redundant, and making the few additions which he obviously intended to make—additions which there is no need to indicate, as they are quite inconsiderable, and are only made in order to prevent an appearance of abruptness in the closing pages.

May I add a word, not as editor but as critic, inviting the attention of other critics to the work as the most complete, and at the same time the most impartial, English study of Victor Hugo, alike as a man and as an author, with which I am acquainted?

FRANCIS GRIBBLE

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1802–1818

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WHILE serving against the Royalists of La Vendée, Captain Joseph-Léopold-Sigisbert Hugo—who in the patriotic fashion of that time styled himself " Brutus Hugo "—had occasion to pay several visits to Nantes. There he met, and became engaged to, Mlle. Sophie Trébuchet, daughter of a shipowner of that town. Partly for political reasons—for the Trébuchet family was Royalist—partly because he was reluctant to expose his daughter to the unsettled life of a soldier's wife, the father discouraged this affair. But the lovers remained constant to each other; and when Captain Hugo was given a post at the War Office in Paris their marriage soon followed, taking place in 1796, at the Hôtel de Ville, without any religious ceremony, the churches at that time being mostly closed, and the priests in hiding. The first child of this union, Abel, was born in 1798, the second, Eugène, in 1800. At Besançon, where Major Hugo—now promoted—was commanding a battalion, a third was expected early in 1802. Both parents hoped for a girl this time, and she was to be called Victorine, after General Victor Lahorie, whom they had asked to be godfather. When the infant came, and proved to be yet another boy, there was nothing for it but to change Victorine

into Victor, to which Marie was added from the godmother, Mme. Delelée, the wife of a brother officer.

Such, together with the date—February 26, 1802 (7 Ventose, year X of the Republic)—are all the essential facts concerning the birth of the future poet. It will be seen that he came in the first instance of middle-class parentage. When he had reached manhood the fancy took him to connect himself on the father's side with the aristocratic Hugos of Lorraine, and to assume the arms and motto of that ancient house. This pedigree was first implied in the particulars he gave to Sainte-Beuve for the *Biographie des Contemporains* (1831); it was referred to, among other places, in *Les Misérables,* where a certain Bishop Hugo of Ptolemais is mentioned as an ancestor of the author; it was circumstantially stated in the biography—or rather autobiography—entitled *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie;* and it was accepted, on the Master's authority, and at his desire, by the various disciples who surrounded him and wrote more or less inspired accounts of him.[1] But the pretension, as

[1] *E.g. Victor Hugo et son temps,* by A. Barbou (1882), where it is asserted that General Hugo was grandson of the Chevalier Charles Hyacinthe Hugo (1699–1738), who married Anne of Spitzemberg and was sixth in direct descent from Georges Hugo, Captain of the Duc de Lorraine's Guards, who had received a patent of nobility in 1535. This assertion makes no mention of General Hugo's father, the carpenter Joseph Hugo—about whom, by the way, the poet himself is always conspicuously silent—but it speaks mysteriously of a "manual trade" to which misfortunes sometimes reduce members of the most illustrious families! The point, however, is that Barbou's inspired declaration that General Hugo was the grandson of the Chevalier is conclusively disproved by M. Biré's complete list of the descendants of Charles Hyacinthe down to 1882; and the correct pedigree of Victor Hugo is established thus:

Jean-Philippe Hugo, *cultivateur.*
|
Joseph Hugo, *menuisier.*
|
Joseph-Léopold-Sigisbert Hugo, General.
|
Victor-Marie Hugo, poet.

every one knows, was—even before Hugo's death—ruthlessly demolished by M. Edmond Biré,[1] who not only destroyed a fictitious genealogy but constructed the true one, proving by dates and documents that the poet's grandfather was a carpenter, and his grandmother a nursery governess, and that his ancestors further back were simple peasants. When the laughter caused by these discoveries had subsided, there was nothing to be done except to bury the unfortunate subject as decently as possible. That was the course adopted by prudent partisans, following the lead of Hugo himself, who, as long ago as 1867, had in his own fashion foreclosed the question by a fine disregard of all awkward details when he wrote thus to a friend: "Personally I attach no importance to genealogical points. A man is what he is; what he has done is the measure of his work. Beyond that, whatever you add or take away counts nothing. Hence my absolute disdain of pedigrees. In my family there have been a shoemaker and a bishop, various ragamuffins and several great lords. . . . If I could choose my ancestors I would rather be descended from a hard-working cobbler than from a *roi fainéant*" (*Lettres de l'Exil*).

These sentiments are very Hugoesque, and also—incidentally—true, but they neither justify unfounded assertions nor explain why a man with an "absolute disdain of pedigrees" should have troubled to invent a fraudulent one. Justification there is none, since, even if we admit that Hugo originally made the assumption of his ancestry in good faith, the details with which he proceeded to support it indicate a research sufficient to have shown that it was untenable. But as to explanation—if that be worth while—it may be found, no doubt, partly in the general inclination of the young Romantics to carry themselves back to Middle Age surroundings—or as far in that direction as possible;[2]

[1] *Victor Hugo avant 1830*, published in 1883.

[2] Hugo regretted that he could not trace further back than 1532,

still more, in Hugo's innate passion for any kind of antithesis. For it may be noted that the first public mention of his noble progenitors was not made until 1831—a time, that is, when the poet's attachment to the Bourbons had already waned. Henceforth, with the progress of his liberal and democratic ideas, he fondled with increasing satisfaction the contrast between chancellors and prelates of old and their descendant of the present—the man of the people. Nay, at times he even adopted the tone of excusing himself for his aristocratic pedigree; whereby we are brought to the very limit of burlesque, that a man should first invent ancestors and then apologise for them. What, one cannot help speculating, would have happened if things had gone the other way—if Hugo had begun as a Republican and ended as the champion of throne and altar? In that case, would the head and tail of the hobby-horse have changed places, and should we have heard a great deal about the *menuisier*, the *cordonnier*, the *savetier*, and whatever other plebeian forefathers might have been discovered or imagined? The subject, after all, becomes wearisome if pressed too far. Hugo made various misstatements about his family—notably in speaking of his mother in her girlhood as one of those devoted Royalists who were hunted through the wilds of La Vendée by Republican troops, whereas she was peacefully residing at Nantes during the '93; but—so far as lineage was concerned—we can hardly imagine that a man of his character took much more than a mild, æsthetic, and patronal interest in other persons of the same name.[1] To connect them with himself was a

because documents anterior to that date had been destroyed when Nancy was sacked in 1670.

[1] In the later part of his life Hugo, complaining half-playfully of the number of people who encroached upon his name, drew up a list of persons whose real name was "Hugot," and who, by dropping the *t* or writing it obscurely, desired to be considered as related to him. But there were also, of course, some genuine "Hugos" unconnected with the poet; and that they did not always benefit by

high compliment for them ; and if the Hugos of Spitzemberg were not his ancestors, well then—to adopt Balzac's well-known remark—so much the worse for the Hugos of Spitzemberg.

But all this digression has taken us a long way from the infant of 1802 who, at first so puny and delicate that his life was despaired of, soon grew into a strong and healthy child.

The vicissitudes of warfare denied to Mme. Hugo and her family any fixed abode : after short sojourns in Marseilles, Corsica, and Elba, they had gone to Paris, while the father's duties took him from place to place. When Joseph Bonaparte was put on the throne of Naples he gave Major Hugo—of whom he had a high opinion—a post on his staff, and entrusted him with the capture of that patriotic brigand, Michel Pezza, known to fame and opera as "Fra Diavolo." This task successfully accomplished, the Major was promoted Colonel and made Governor of the province of Avellino. Here, with some prospect of a settled home, he sent for his wife and family (October 1807).

Great men usually discover a prodigious memory

so illustrious a name appears from the following story : There arrived one day ten casks of rum from Martinique addressed to "M. V. Hugo, Paris." Naturally the Customs officials thought of the one and only V. Hugo, and communicated with him. Almost as naturally the poet supposed that this was a present from some unknown admirer in the West Indies—had he not many such ? He therefore paid duty on one cask and took it out of bond. Two months later he took a second, and soon afterwards a third. Meanwhile the proper consignee, whose name was "Vincent Hugo," anxious at the long delay in receiving his expected goods, applied to the *douane*. With many regrets they explained the facts to him ; which did not prevent him, however, from suing them for the three missing casks and getting compensation. Victor Hugo, having acted *bona fide*, did not come into the case. But what people asked themselves in amazement was, How had our poet managed in less than three months to consume three large fifty-gallon casks of raw spirit ? The mystery was solved when it appeared that Victor—who had no use for rum—had exchanged the casks with a wine merchant for their equal value in good Burgundy. After this, who shall say that poets are unpractical ?

of their early days. One is, therefore, not surprised to hear how vividly the five-year child was impressed by incidents of the journey—the passage in a sledge over Mont Cenis, the keen mountain air creating such an appetite that an eagle killed by a shepherd was roasted and eaten in the temporary absence of other flesh or fowl; the peasants of Parma walking barefoot, with their shoes slung over their necks to avoid spoiling the leather in the swampy ground; above all, the skeletons of bandits hanging from trees at intervals along the road. After Turin, Florence, and Rome, the travellers reached Naples "radiant in sunshine and bounded by the azure of its sea, like a white robe fringed with blue." Thence, after a few days' rest, they continued their southward journey to picturesque Avellino, where in "a marble palace fissured by age and earthquakes with long corridors and deep recesses for hide-and-seek, and in the grounds a wooded ravine with trees to climb and nuts to gather," the children found a delightful playground. Victor remembers that the wall of his room had a great crack in it through which he could see the trees and fields outside: the climate was so warm that this additional ventilation did not matter. But the stay in southern Italy lasted only a few months. Raised from the troublesome throne of Naples to the still more perilous dignity of the Spanish crown, King Joseph desired Colonel Hugo to accompany him to Madrid; and it was thought better that the family should return to Paris. In a letter written to his mother about this time the Colonel says of Victor: "He has a great aptitude for study: he is as steady (*posé*) as his eldest brother, and of a very reflective turn. He speaks little, and never except to the point." This last sentence might be used as a text to show that the boy is not always the father of the man.

Then began the epoch of "Les Feuillantines," celebrated in so much of Hugo's poetry—that spacious house and garden which, before the Revolution, had

been a convent, and the present owner of which, while occupying one portion of it himself, let the other to Mme. Hugo, together, it seems, with the run of all the grounds. The garden, worthy almost to be called a park, besides containing all manner of fruit and flowers, had uncultivated parts grown over with trees, shrubs, and wild vegetation. It was here especially that the Hugo boys loved to wander, peopling this wilderness with strange creatures of fancy whose non-existence only made them the more exciting. And one of those who joined them here in playing with swing or go-cart was Adèle Foucher, the daughter of an old War Office colleague and friend of Colonel Hugo, a timid, dark-eyed child who was destined to become the poet's sweetheart and his wife.

Victor, though studious, was no bookworm: he liked all boyish amusements, and he liked to take the lead. The eldest brother, Abel, had been sent to a *lycée* as a weekly boarder; the two younger ones were now entrusted to the teaching of a certain M. Larivière, who kept a modest school in the Rue Saint-Jacques. This good man was an ex-priest who, during the Reign of Terror, being faced with matrimony or the guillotine, had chosen the less of two evils and married his cook. The instruction given at his school was elementary, its methods homely and informal. "While the class was going on, the ex-cook, 'Mother Larivière' (as the boys called her), would bring her husband his cup of *café au lait*, and taking from his hands the exercise he might be dictating, went on reading it out herself until he had finished his breakfast." It seems that Victor had already taught himself to read, with a simplicity appropriate to genius, "by merely looking at the printed letters"; he soon picked up writing and arithmetic.

Two incidents of this period (1809) he records as having impressed him. The first was a view of the Emperor passing through the streets on his way to a

festival at the Panthéon : " cet homme souverain passer muet et grave ainsi qu'un dieu d'airain." [1]

The other, which might have been especially arranged by Providence to counteract the fascination of the " God in bronze," was a visit from the boy's godfather, General Lahorie, now a fugitive for complicity in Moreau's conspiracy and afterwards to be executed for his share in that of Malet. Lahorie had been given a temporary refuge by Mme. Hugo, and one evening when three other Generals were calling on her he stealthily joined the group which was standing on the grass under the trees and, engaging in conversation, denounced Napoleon's apostasy from Republican principles in language full of epigram and antithesis. He ended by placing his hand solemnly on Victor's shoulder and saying in a never-to-be-forgotten tone : " My boy, remember this—before everything—Liberty ! "

This graphic scene, passing in the dark garden of Les Feuillantines, while the streets outside were illuminated for an imperial *fête,* and the people were shouting *Vive l'Empereur !* would have adorned any of Hugo's dramas : as a contribution to history, it is less fortunate. For, though Lahorie's sombre figure may have emerged in the gloaming as an apostle of Liberty, it seems pretty certain that none of the three other persons named could have been in Paris at the time. And there are other impossibilities which it would take too long to set forth.

Meanwhile, in Spain, General Hugo—as he now was—had risen to high dignity. He had distinguished himself in guerilla warfare, had become first *aide-de-camp* to King Joseph, had been made a Count and Governor of three provinces with his headquarters at Segovia. Early in 1811, apparently because the King wished to be surrounded by a full and regular Court, he sent for his wife and family to join him. Reluctantly Mme. Hugo, with her boys, set out on the long and perilous journey.

[1] *Feuilles d'Automne* (*Souvenirs d'Enfance*).

The diligence took them to Bayonne, where they were detained for a month waiting for the convoy and escort of troops which went every three months in charge of bullion. At Bayonne a box was taken at the theatre, and the boys were sent there night after night; unfortunately there was no change in the bill, and the *Ruines de Babylone* became so oppressively familiar that, after the seventh evening, they begged to be allowed to stay at home. It cost Mme. Hugo nearly a hundred pounds to engage a *carrosse* with six mules and driver to take her party from Bayonne to Madrid; but she was lucky in getting the place of honour and safety just behind the escort, in a long train of upwards of a hundred carriages, all eager to avail themselves of this protection against brigands. Their first halt was at the village of Ernani, which, with its one long wide street and its ancient houses still bearing their armorial devices of the fifteenth century, delighted Victor so much that, years later, he gave the name of the place to his well-known drama.

Already the boy, though devoted to and dependent on his mother, had his own personality in the appreciation of Nature and Art. Mme. Hugo had no mediæval tastes: she shuddered at grim, Gothic Ernani but was pleased with smiling, cultivated Tolosa: she preferred creature comforts to æsthetic satisfaction; and while the son gazed in fascination at a curiously wrought silver cruet, the mother's only concern was to find out whether the cruet contained oil good enough for making a salad. To her the whole journey was a tedious martyrdom. The French of course were cordially detested in Spain, and though "Madame la Comtesse" (as she was called in virtue of her husband's rank) was quartered in the best houses, she was made to feel that to the eyes of her unwilling hosts she represented a nation of robbers. As a rule the master and mistress of the house did not receive their guests in person, but simply left them to

the care of servants, first ostentatiously locking up all valuables. On one occasion, however, a Spanish grandee had been so exceptionally courteous that Mme. Hugo, when leaving, was encouraged to ask if he would part with a certain vase which had taken her fancy. With elaborate politeness the Spaniard handed it to her, and when she asked how much she should pay he pretended not to comprehend. When she again made it clear that she wanted to buy the article, he said ironically that there must be some misunderstanding: "He had tried to make the lady feel that she was in her own house, not his; Spain and its people were the property of the conqueror; he was amazed that the French, who had plundered and burned whole towns, should show so much scruple about taking a little bit of china!" This was nasty, if natural. Another disgraceful thing was the number and virulence of the Spanish fleas: there was no getting away from them; they—and the other things—infested every place. Even in towns which the French had reduced to ashes these patriotic vermin remained to punish the invader: as Mme. Hugo ruefully remarked, "In Spain even the fire seems to breed fleas."

Apart from these more or less petty vexations the journey was uneventful. At one point there was a false alarm of a guerilla attack; at another—going down a steep hill near Mondragon—the tired mules could not keep back the coach, and all together might have gone over a precipice had not one of the wheels caught against a large stone, which gave time for the Grenadiers who were riding alongside to cut the traces and hoist back carriage and beasts. A fortnight brought them to Burgos, the boy's impression of which is described in one of the best-known poems.[1] Here they stayed four days, and made several visits to the cathedral. Once, while Victor stood admiring the elaborate stonework, a strange dwarf-like figure

[1] *Odes et Ballades*, Book V. (*Mon Enfance*).

suddenly came out from a wall, made the sign of the cross, and struck three knocks. This was an automatic doll which marked the hours : its fantastic appearance amid such solemn surroundings appealed vividly to the child's imagination and first suggested to him the powerful effects which may be produced by a union of the grave and the grotesque.

After a visit to the tomb of The Cid—desecrated at this time by the bullets of French troops who used it as a target for musketry practice—after other halts at Valladolid and Segovia, they reached Madrid and took up their residence in the Masserano Palace. In this building, a favourite resort of the boys, was the long portrait gallery, and it was here, from contemplating the grandees of the past as they looked down from their frames, that Victor, by his own account, caught the germ of that idea which twenty years later he developed in the famous "portrait scene" of *Hernani*.

General Hugo, whose eldest son Abel was already one of King Joseph's pages, now decided to place the two younger ones as boarders at the College of Nobles. Accordingly Eugène and Victor entered what seemed to them a prison—a vast gloomy place containing only twenty-four pupils, though it had accommodation for five hundred, for the Spanish nobility did their best to boycott an institution which had to recognise French authority. When Victor woke up on the day after his arrival he saw, with something of a shock, standing at the foot of his bed a hideous hunchback in blue breeches and yellow stockings. This was the servant whose business was to call the young gentlemen in the mornings. "Corcova"—as the pupils named him from his physical infirmity—was a monster, but an amiable monster, like the "Quasimodo" and the "Triboulet" we know. Both Hugo boys detested the College, outside the walls of which they were only allowed twice a week. Between them and their Spanish schoolfellows there was constant feud—sometimes even war to the knife, with wounds and

bloodshed. Whichever party triumphed at the moment, there is no doubt that the last word remained with the French side, since Victor years afterwards used the names of his two best hated opponents—the Comte de Belverana and a certain Elespuru—for two of the most odious characters in *Lucrèce Borgia* and *Cromwell* : an achievement which, though the poet relates it with some pride, does more credit to his memory than to his magnanimity.

It was with unfeigned joy that, early in 1812, the Hugos said good-bye to Madrid and its College. The growing insecurity of the French position in the Peninsula decided General Hugo to send his wife and two younger boys back to Paris. And so Mme. Hugo, after a journey without incident, found herself once more in the beloved Les Feuillantines, which she had retained during her stay in Spain. Studies were resumed under M. Larivière, but as the boys were too advanced now to attend his elementary school, he came to their house to give them lessons. It is difficult to suppose that there was anything *ultra*, either in politics or religion, about the education given by this unfrocked and accommodating priest. Yet Hugo, seeking in later life to excuse his early royalism and orthodoxy, laid much stress on the perils of priestcraft to which his boyhood had been exposed, "the narrow and obscurantist creed of caste and clergy . . . a system which inoculates young minds with the old age of prejudice, taking dawn away from the child's soul and substituting night," and so on—a theme of which he never tires. Perhaps with the same object the plain "M. Larivière" of the biography is written in *Actes et Paroles* as the "Abbé de la Rivière," which sounds more clerical and alarming.

> J'eus, dans ma blonde enfance, hélas ! trop éphémère,
> Trois maîtres—un jardin, un vieux prêtre et ma mère.[1]

Thus the poet summarises his early training. The

[1] *Les Rayons et les Ombres.*

educational value of the garden—that of Les Feuillantines—is not in dispute: the priest has already been described; there remains the mother. Now Mme. Hugo was, by her son's own account, before all things a woman of plain practical common sense. Her royalism was a matter of convention not conviction, her religion was of Voltairean elasticity. When her sons were at school in Madrid she had objected to their serving as acolytes at the Mass, and when told that this was the custom for all Catholic pupils, she had promptly settled things by describing them as Protestants. And now, when they were back in Paris, she put in practice her liberal ideas of education by allowing the boys to read anything they came across—indeed, she even employed them as book-tasters for her, sending them to the library to select any literature they thought likely to amuse her. In this way Victor and his brother became familiar with many works which are usually kept from children. Mme. Hugo's principle was that books never did any harm. Whether she was right or wrong is another point; the fact itself suffices to relegate to poetic legend Hugo's theory of his priest-ridden bringing up.

Under Larivière's tuition the boy, now eleven years old, got on fast with his Latin. Some of his exercises belonging to this period have been preserved and may be seen in the Museum of the Place des Vosges. It was usual to set a fable in French to be translated into Latin, and Victor's habit was to make first a quite literal version, then to polish this into an improved form, after which he would add a reflection of his own and adorn the whole with a pen-and-ink sketch appropriate to the subject. Thus, after translating the story of the clemency of Pyrrhus, it occurred to him to add, by way of comment, the well-known line of Virgil, "Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos," rendering it as "Pardonner aux vaincus et vaincre les rebelles." Then follows a sketch representing two warriors, the conqueror stretching out

his hand to help his conquered foe to rise up ; in the background a house and mountain. Hugo, as every one knows, was a remarkably talented draughtsman, and the habit of illustrating his subjects remained with him alike in his novels and dramas, and in practical affairs such as the construction of his house in Guernsey, full plans of which were found among his papers.

At the end of this year (1813) the family had to leave Les Feuillantines, the garden of which was required by the municipality for extending the Rue d'Ulm, and they moved into a house in the then Rue du Cherche-Midi. General Hugo, who had long and bravely defended Thionville against the invading Allies, returned permanently to Paris after the second Restoration. Though warmly attached to Joseph Bonaparte, he had never been a favourite of the Emperor ; and so he accepted with equanimity the new Bourbon Government, which indeed gave handsome recognition to his military services. He desired his two younger boys eventually to go through the Ecole Polytechnique ; and in order to provide them first with a sound general education, he now placed them at the Pension Cordier, from which they were also to attend lectures at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. Both brothers, the younger especially, showed an aptitude for mathematics, and Victor's lasting fondness for figures may be seen in the many curiously minute calculations which occur here and there in his novels. Another of his early developed tastes was for carpentry, and we hear of a gigantic fortress he constructed in the coach-house : mimic warfare was naturally much in vogue among the French youth at the time when their elders were fighting in such desperate earnest. But it was to literature that his chief inclination already drew him. He began by composing plays which he and his schoolfellows performed in the classroom on tables put together to form a stage : it was the wars of the Empire with which these

dramas dealt, and to avoid jealousy each boy took in turn the coveted part of Napoleon.

Soon the fever of poetry set in vigorously. In the course of one year—1816—besides translations of Horace and Virgil into French verse, the boy of fourteen produced an imaginative poem, *Le Déluge*, and a tragedy, *Irtamène*, the subject of which is the restoration to Egypt of its lawful sovereign. Obviously inspired by the study of Racine, this first effort in drama is written in the approved classic style, with a long recital of events by a messenger; and its motive is devotion to royalty. A second drama, a tragedy called *Athélie*, was sketched out but only partly written; the reason for its non-completion being perhaps that Victor found himself encumbered by an attempt to preserve the unity of place —the whole action being supposed to occur in front of the Temple of Odin—as well as by the tendency, so inevitable with beginners, to find all the scenes falling into monologues, or—at the best—duologues. After these serious works it was a diversion to write (in prose) an *opéra-comique*, and the melodrama of *Inez de Castro*. Needless to say, these exercises—as well as many short poems of a warlike spirit—were quite outside the school curriculum; they had, however, the approval and encouragement of Mme. Hugo, who deserves all credit for recognising the true direction of her son's talents. She and the General were now practically separated, having made a more or less amicable arrangement to that effect; and the children were entirely under their mother's care. It was to her, to his brother Eugène, and to a friendly usher of the *pension*, Biscarrat by name, that the boy submitted what afterwards he wittily described as "les bêtises que M. Victor Hugo faisait avant sa naissance." But the youthful poet was his own severest critic, as may be seen from these preserved MSS. In one collection, entitled *Poésies Diverses*, under his name "Victor" he has written: "I am fifteen; I have done badly, but I shall be able

to do better." Many passages have been ruthlessly erased; against others occur annotations such as M. (mal), P.M. (pas mal), B. (bien), and so on. (And it may be noted that Hugo's handwriting seems to have grown with his development: at first quite small and compact with flourished endings, then in middle life of moderate size, finally—from 1860 or so onwards—conspicuously large as befitted the great man.) The boy who had taught himself the principles of French prosody, knew also by instinct what was good or bad as literature, and he aimed high. "Je veux être Chateaubriand ou rien"—Chateaubriand or nothing—that is the motto found in one of his exercise books, and it acknowledges an influence paramount with all young France of that time; an influence which pointed the way back to such admirable models of literature as the Bible, Homer, and Virgil.

But the most important event of this period was Victor's competition for the poetry prize of 1817, given by the French Academy, the subject of which was "The happiness which may be derived from study in any situation of life." On this truly academical theme young Hugo composed quickly enough a piece of 334 lines, without saying a word about it, even to his mother. There was some difficulty about delivering the MS., which had to be done by the candidate in person, since the pupils of the Pension Cordier were only allowed out on Sundays, and on that day the secretary's office was closed. Biscarrat, however, being admitted into the secret, good-naturedly contrived to take the boys for a walk that way; and then, leaving the rest for a few moments to admire the dome and the lions of the Institute, he hastened with Victor to the office and there deposited the precious MS., together with the sealed envelope containing the candidate's name. When the result was published some months later, No. 15 was placed ninth in order of merit and received an honourable mention. The standard on this occasion was excep-

tionally high, since out of forty-six candidates no fewer than ten seemed to the judges worthy of commendation. The prize was divided between MM. Lebrun and Saintine (afterwards famous as the author of *Picciola*); another distinguished competitor was Casimir Delavigne, who, with fatal levity, disqualified himself by denying the proposition instead of illustrating it, and ending with the conclusion that "next to love, study is the best of misfortunes."

Every one has heard the story, originally circulated by Sainte-Beuve and adopted by most subsequent biographers, that Victor's reference to himself as one who had "barely completed his three lustres" vexed the judges, who, incredulous of so good a poem by so youthful a poet, assigned him a mention only instead of the first prize he would otherwise have got; and that the boy, horrified at the suspicion of having made fun of the Academy, forwarded his birth-certificate and afterwards had an interview with M. Raynouard, the secretary. It seems a pity to disfigure so pretty a legend by the vulgarity of fact, but the words of the official report, "if he is really only that age, the Academy feels it right to encourage the young poet," plainly indicate that Victor's fifteen years helped to procure him the recognition he received rather than debarred him from the higher distinction, although there remains, of course, just enough ambiguity in the word "really" (*véritablement*) to give colour to the other interpretation for those who prefer it. In any case, even to be "mentioned" was a remarkable achievement for a schoolboy, and at once made the young laureate's name known. Not only did he become a privileged person at the Pension Cordier, and the idol of his family; he was also invited to dinner by M. François de Neufchâteau, a writer and statesman of importance under the Empire. Possibly it was either that venerable Academician—or else Alexandre Soumet—who first spoke of Victor as the "enfant sublime": a title which Hugo himself declared

to have been applied to him a little later by Chateaubriand in connection with his *Ode on the Death of the Duc de Berri,* and to have been printed in an article by M. Agier in the *Drapeau Blanc.* No such article, though carefully sought for, can be found, and the celebrated phrase, quickly adopted by every one, has no more sure foundation than its own inherent probability. Chateaubriand himself always denied it, even furiously. When Hugo was received into the French Academy in 1841, M. de Salvandy, to whom it fell to deliver the complimentary reception speech, and who had no great personal admiration for the new member, was speaking a few days before the event of the difficulty of his task. Chateaubriand happened to be present, and turning to him, Salvandy said : " After all, I can get out of it by developing your famous *mot.*"

" What ! that cursed thing again ! " shrieked Chateaubriand ; " now please understand once for all that I never made that —— joke."

This was strong, but not strong enough to dislodge a legend become inexpugnable by dint of repetition. When Salvandy made his speech he could not avoid the fascinating words, though he was careful not to father them on Chateaubriand or on any one in particular. We also must leave them at that ; it would be absurd to pursue further the not very remarkable junction of this noun and adjective.

Meanwhile the boy continued his studies at the College of Louis-le-Grand. In physics he obtained some distinction, philosophy he confesses did not interest him, and as to mathematics, though he liked the subject, he could only concentrate himself on it by fits and starts. College professors, as we know, are often the unintentional means of fostering literary tastes in their audience, and Victor, like common mortals, did not disdain to beguile the dullness of a lecture by furtively reading *Le Génie du Christianisme.* When the book was discovered and confiscated, he fell back on the familiar

resource of carving his name on the desk. In August 1818 his schooldays ended. Readers of *Les Contemplations* will remember the wealth of language in which, with a somewhat laboured humour, he recalls his delight at escaping from the

> Marchands de grec ! marchands de latin ! cuistres ! dogues !

&c. &c.; at the same time he endorses common experience when he says :

> O temps ! jours radieux ! aube trop tôt ravie
> Pourquoi donc Dieu met-il le meilleur de la vie
> Tout au commencement ?

CHAPTER II

1819–1821

The Foucher family : Victor's success in the " Floral Games " : The path that never did run smooth : The *Conservateur Littéraire* : Hugo's later treatment of his early writings : First visit to Chateaubriand : The toilet of a great man : Mme. de Chateaubriand and the chocolate : Introduction to Lamartine : Death of Mme. Hugo : Friendship with the Duc de Rohan and with the Abbé de Lamennais : First impressions of actresses : The history of an autograph

THE first period after leaving school was a happy time. Not only was Victor delighted to be at home with his mother, who was now living at 18 Rue des Vieux-Augustins; he was also constantly seeing another person even nearer to his heart. This was Adèle Foucher, once the child who had played with the Hugos in the garden of Les Feuillantines, now a graceful brunette of sweet seventeen. There was close friendship between the two families, and often of an evening Mme. Hugo and her sons looked in to spend an hour or two with the Fouchers. The scene has been drawn for us. M. Foucher, an invalid, talks but little : he and Mme. Hugo exchange occasional pinches of snuff. Mme. Foucher and her daughter are busy with their needles ; and Adèle, looking from over her work, finds Victor's eyes fixed upon her in an admiration which she neither mistakes nor resents. Eugène and young Foucher no doubt entertain each other as best they can : they are rather out of the picture. For some while this silent courtship went on. It was on April 26, 1819, that Victor first told Adèle his "secret," and she in turn told him hers ; and so the engagement began.

If the young poet needed any incitement to work,

he found it in the hope of winning his bride. He seems to have entered for two or three other Academy competitions without result, but at the ancient and famous "Jeux Floraux"—in which every year the Academy of Toulouse gave prizes for poetry in the form of gold and silver flowers—he was twice successful in the same year. The first of these prize poems was his *Ode on the Restoration of the Equestrian Statue of Henri IV.*—an event in which the author had himself taken a part, having (as he tells us in the ode) joined the crowd which unharnessed the tired oxen and dragged to the Pont-Neuf the great bronze figure of the popular king. The one hundred and twenty lines of which the poem consists were written at a sitting. For Victor, owing to his mother's illness at the time, had given up the idea of competing; but when Mme. Hugo recovered and found what had happened, she was so disappointed that her son set himself at once to work, and finished his ode just in time for its despatch to Toulouse; where it won the first prize—the *lys d'or*—against numerous competitors, one of whom was Lamartine. At the same competition Hugo's *Les Vierges de Verdun* was rewarded with the gold amaranth, while his third piece, *Les Derniers Bardes,* got an honourable mention. This notable success attracted attention; and from Toulouse Alexandre Soumet, the poet and dramatist, wrote to Victor: "Your seventeen years find among us here nothing but admirers—indeed almost doubters. You are an enigma, the secret of which the Muses keep." Next year (1820) yet another prize was gained at Toulouse by the ode *Moïse sur le Nil,* and thus young Hugo became entitled to the diploma of "Maître ès Jeux Floraux"—an honour which debarred him from competing again.

All these, as well as *La Vendée*—written about the same time—are to be found in *Odes et Ballades;* more interesting perhaps than any of them are the verses called *Le Premier Soupir,* dated December 1819.

Referring to Adèle and composed in sorrowful fear of a separation, they constitute the first written evidence of Hugo's love, and serve as a fitting preface to those *Lettres à la Fiancée* in which we may read the chief part of the young man's life for the next two years. But these letters had hardly been begun when they were interrupted by a disaster which the first few of them—notably that of April 18—seem to forebode. What happened was very much what might have been expected to happen. M. and Mme. Foucher had soon learned from their daughter how things were, and they called on Mme. Hugo to ascertain her views. As it happened, Victor, devoted as he was to his mother, had on this one subject feared to take her into his confidence, and so Mme. Hugo was equally surprised and annoyed. To a woman of her strong common sense the idea was ridiculous. Fancy an engagement between two young people whose united ages amounted to thirty-five years and their united income to *nil!* "Such a marriage," she declared, "is preposterous and impossible, and shall never have my consent." That was flat: the Fouchers were rather hurt and the two families became estranged. But neither Victor nor his sweetheart thought of rebellion: children in those days obeyed their parents with wonderful docility, and for a while all direct communications between the lovers ceased.

This happened at the end of April 1820. But the poet did not despair: it was not his fault that he was so young, and at any rate time was on his side. He now set himself vigorously to the work of the *Conservateur Littéraire*—a fortnightly review which he and his brothers had started a few months before, as a humble auxiliary to Chateaubriand's *Conservateur*. Though this periodical numbered among its occasional contributors Alfred de Vigny, Soumet, and other less known men, there is no doubt that the bulk of it was written, over one or other of a score of different signatures, by

Hugo himself. Articles on painting, sculpture, music, the drama—stories, such as the *Bug Jargal* in its first form—satires like *Le Télégraphe*—lyrical poems in abundance—nothing came amiss to his ready pen. As a literary critic he showed great erudition and memory as well as an open mind and a style as yet unspoiled by the abuse of antithesis. It is clear, too, that at this time his views on drama were not yet of the "Romantic" order. In declaring the superiority of Corneille and Racine to Shakespeare and Schiller he writes:

"We have never understood the distinction made between the classic and the romantic *genre*. The plays of Shakespeare and Schiller only differ from those of Corneille and Racine in being more full of defects. That is the reason why they have to employ so much scenic pomp, and accessories which French tragedy despises because it appeals straight to the heart," &c. &c.

Curiously enough he condemns also, as "destructive of the harmony of a period," the use of the *enjambement* in Alexandrine verse, a device which was soon to become the hall-mark of his own, and of all Romantic, poetry.

Though the *Conservateur Littéraire* was non-political, its sentiments were, of course, ardently loyal; so much so that King Louis XVIII. was a constant reader, and, being especially pleased with the *Ode on the Death of the Duc de Berri*, ordered a bounty of 500 francs to be paid to the young poet out of his privy purse. Royalty and religion had at this period no more devoted champion than Victor Hugo. "Leave things to time," General Hugo is reported to have remarked; "the boy has the opinions of his mother, the man will have those of his father." The saying, like Chateaubriand's, is probably one of those that were never said; but the fact, which it was perhaps invented to explain, is perfectly clear. Some years later, when Hugo republished (*Littérature et Philosophie mêlées*, 1834) certain of his contributions to the *Conservateur Littéraire*, he

tried to minimise the difference between his past and present opinions by means of slight verbal alterations, changes of dates, and the like; and that although everything professes to be exactly as it originally appeared.

This anything but pious fraud marks the beginning of an unscrupulous system of editing and revision which the author applied to his writings in general, and especially to such as contained indications of his political views. We can only wonder that so paltry a trick should have seemed worth while; for it was not really a matter of great concern at what precise moment Hugo passed from Bourbonism to Napoleonism, or thence to Republicanism.

But—to return to the days of the *Conservateur Littéraire*—one immediate effect of Victor's writings was to bring him the acquaintance of Chateaubriand. M. Agier, a Royalist deputy—on the great man's bidding—conducted young Hugo to an interview which he rather dreaded. One evening, about seven o'clock, they reached Chateaubriand's house in the Rue Saint-Dominique; and the scene is thus described by the "witness" of Hugo's life:

"After passing through the ante-chamber, they were taken into a large reception-room, simply furnished, its chairs and sofas cased in grey covers. Mme. de Chateaubriand, who was sitting on a sofa, did not move. The master of the house, standing with his back to the fireplace, without stirring from his position, said to Victor: 'I am delighted to see you, M. Hugo. I have read your verses—those on La Vendée, and those you have just written on the Duc de Berri. There are, especially in the latter, things which no other poet of this time could have produced. My age and experience give me, unfortunately, the privilege of being frank, and I tell you candidly that there are some passages I care much less for; but what is fine in your odes is very fine.'"

This was no niggardly praise: and yet—in the speaker's attitude, in his tone, in that way of differentiating one part from another—there was such a touch of supremacy that Victor felt himself abased rather than exalted. He stammered out a few awkward words, and was very anxious to depart. Opportunely, at that moment, a diversion was effected by the arrival of two of Chateaubriand's friends, the Marquis de Talaru and the Marquis d'Herbouville. Victor recovered his self-possession to some degree, and was able to take a good look at the famous writer, whom as yet he knew only by his books.

M. de Chateaubriand adopted a military bearing: the man of the pen suggested the man of the sword. His neck was kept stiff and straight by a black cravat which concealed his shirt-collar; a black frock-coat, buttoned right up, gave erectness to his small bent frame. The striking feature about him was his head, out of proportion to his stature, but fine and dignified. The line of the nose was firm and masterful, the eye proud, the smile full of charm; but that smile was only an occasional flash, and the mouth soon resumed its expression of stern severity.

The master of the house said little, and Victor was relieved when M. Agier rose to take leave. In bidding them good-bye M. de Chateaubriand asked Victor to come and see him again, saying that he would find him at home any day between seven and nine in the morning. Once more in the street, the young man breathed freely.

"Well," said M. Agier, "I hope you are pleased."

"Yes, I am—to be outside again."

"Why! what do you mean?" exclaimed the deputy. "M. de Chateaubriand has been most gracious to you: he has been unusually talkative. You don't know him—he sometimes goes four or five hours without uttering a word. He has made an exception in your favour, by granting you so speedily your *entrée* to his house. If you are not satisfied you must be difficult to please."

Such was the first interview between the man of the moment and the man of the future. Victor would have us believe that in becoming one of Chateaubriand's *clientèle* he was simply obeying his mother's wishes: without her he would not have availed himself of the privilege.

However that be, he called one morning soon afterwards and met with a much less formal reception. Chateaubriand at 8 A.M. was quite a different person from Chateaubriand at 8 P.M. On this occasion he was sitting in his dressing-room, looking over a pile of papers on a table in front of him. He greeted his young friend most cordially, asked him what work he had been doing lately, and, when Victor replied that he had been trying some more poetry, said emphatically: "You are quite right; go on with that. Poetry is the highest level of literature. You are on a loftier plane than I: the poet is the real writer. As for myself, I have done something in that way and I regret that I did not continue it; my verses were better than my prose."

Thereupon he summoned his secretary and told him to fetch the MS. of the tragedy *Moïse*. When it arrived he proceeded with much complacency to read selections to his visitor, who found himself embarrassed by the consciousness of being expected to admire what in his secret heart he thought rather poor stuff, and who wondered more and more as the reading progressed how the author of *Les Martyrs* could ever had imagined that poetry rather than prose was his strong point. Had he been a little older he would doubtless have known that it is one of the commonest foibles of human nature for a man who excels in one particular thing to fancy himself better in something else.

"Having finished the extracts from *Moïse*, Chateaubriand, who had been clad simply in a dressing-gown, proceeded to his toilet. A valet brought in a good-sized tub of water, and the master unrobed preparatory

to his morning bath. Victor would have retired, but, being pressed to stay, remained. The sponging, rubbing, and dressing were accomplished, the great man devoted himself to his teeth, which were very fine and for which he kept a case of instruments worthy of a dentist. The bath had enlivened him and he talked with great animation all the while that he was brushing his mouth."

In short, Victor was charmed with so much affability, and when he got home he sat down and wrote in honour of Chateaubriand the ode entitled *Le Génie*. After this he paid frequent visits to the Rue Saint-Dominique, but without ever again finding its master in so genial a mood as on that memorable morning.

"As a rule M. de Chateaubriand was as I had found him at my first visit—polite but frigid. His was a character which inspired respect rather than sympathy : you felt yourself in the presence of a genius, not of a man."

Hugo's early personal memories include also some references to Chateaubriand's well-known indiscriminate generosity—the pile of five-franc pieces on his mantelshelf for the benefit of those countless mendicants —mostly impostors—who could make out that in some way they had suffered by the Revolution. This habit, of course, involved the great writer in financial difficulties, obliging him—among other things—to sell in advance his *Mémoires d'Outre tombe*. Once, when he was visiting the exiled Charles X. at Prague, the ex-king inquired about his circumstances. "I am as poor as a church mouse," was the reply ; "in fact, I count myself among Mme. de Chateaubriand's objects of charity." For Madame was, like her husband, charitable—though in a different and more orderly way. She patronised institutions for the relief of deserving cases, as Victor found out to his cost on the only occasion when she deigned to take much notice of him. He tells (in *Choses Vues*) how one day Mme. de Chateaubriand

smiled upon him with unwonted graciousness, and pointing to a package which lay on a table said: "I have reserved that for you, M. Hugo; I thought it would please you." She explained that the parcel contained chocolate manufactured by a religious community in which she was interested, and that the proceeds of its sale were given to the help of good works. The chocolate was, she admitted, rather dear —five francs a pound—but it was excellent; and she suggested that Victor might like to purchase a pound. Put on his mettle by Mme. de Chateaubriand's grand airs the young man said that he would take three pounds. "I took," he tells us, "and I paid. At this time I had to live for fifteen months on 800 francs. That chocolate, and Mme. de Chateaubriand's smile, cost me 15 francs, that is, twenty days' food. It was the *dearest* woman's smile that was ever sold to me."

It might be an exaggeration to describe Hugo's remarks on the great re-creator of French literature as trivial and rather undignified; it is certain, however, that no one reading them would imagine—what we know from other sources—that in his young days he had sat at the feet of Chateaubriand, the most devoted of disciples and admirers. But many years had passed since then, and when *Hugo Raconté* was published there was no longer any link with the past except that legend of the "enfant sublime," which was still cherished with fond affection.

Besides Chateaubriand, the editor of the *Conservateur Littéraire* made the acquaintance of other interesting persons—Alfred de Vigny, for example, and Lamartine. The latter has described his first meeting with Hugo, thus:

"I remember as though it were yesterday the morning when the Duc de Rohan said to me: 'Come and let me show you a phenomenon which promises a great man to France. You will be proud some day to have seen the oak when it was an acorn.' I went with

him and we entered a humble house in the Rue du Pot-de-Fer. There was a sound of children's voices buzzing like a hive of bees in spring. Several children of different ages were repeating their lessons to their mother. The woman led us along a passage and down some steps to her lodger's room, and there we found a studious youth, with a fine serious face, writing or reading, away from the tumult of the house. The youth was Victor Hugo." (*Entretiens.*)

Mention of the Duc de Rohan indicates that the scene just quoted must have occurred soon after Hugo had sustained the first great sorrow of his life—the loss of his mother. Mme. Hugo had long been in delicate health; it has been mentioned that she was seriously ill when her son was competing for the prizes of the Toulouse Academy, and since then she had been always ailing. Like all who suffer from weakness of the lungs she needed air and light: the close quarters of a third-story flat had been very trying after the beautiful garden of Les Feuillantines. She felt this so much that at the beginning of 1821 she moved into a house in the Rue Mézières, where there was a garden of some sort in which she and her sons worked vigorously. Over-exertion and a consequent chill seem to have been the immediate cause of another illness, which began in May and ended fatally on June 27. The funeral service took place at the church of Saint-Sulpice, and the interment at the Montparnasse cemetery. There is no need to dwell on Victor's desolation, expressed in pathetic letters to his friends: his mother had been everything to him, her favourite son; and even his love for Adèle had been put into the background in deference to her.

Among those who followed the body to the grave was a young priest of distinguished appearance. He was a stranger to the Hugos, who learnt that he was the Duc de Rohan. Heart-broken at the death of his young wife, he had taken orders and was now attached

to the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice. A few days later, through a common friend, he sent a message to ask if he might call on Victor; who, however, considering that it was his duty to acknowledge the tribute of respect paid to his mother, went himself to the Seminary, and found the peer-priest in his humbly furnished cell. He was received with cordial sympathy, and the two became such friends that, when the Duke went for the vacation to his château at La Roche-Guyon on the Seine, he invited the young poet to come and stay with him. Victor went there in August and found himself surrounded by the luxury and splendour of a nobleman's mansion—gilded saloons, sumptuous furniture, obsequious lackeys. The contrast between all this and the monastic cell of Saint-Sulpice impressed him strangely; he felt that he was out of his element here, and though his host was kindness itself, he thought best not to prolong his stay beyond four days. He was conscious of the social gulf between himself and his friend; he shrank from the least possibility of patronage; he loved the Duke but preferred him in the simplicity of a cloistered life rather than in the magnificence of a ducal estate. Such a sentiment can easily be understood. We can see, also, how Victor, in his first overwhelming grief at his bereavement, turned naturally to the solace of religion and lent a ready ear to the words of its ministers. When, therefore, the Duc de Rohan, on returning to Paris, advised him to take a confessor, he consented. But the first priest proposed for this object—an Abbé whose sermons at that time attracted all fashionable Paris—by no means appealed to the young man, who was taken by the Duke to luncheon with him. On leaving the house Victor declared that he would prefer a less worldly type of confessor. The Duc de Rohan then suggested Lamennais. They called on him next day and found that, by a strange coincidence, he had been living in the Hugos' old house, Les Feuillantines. He was just

changing his quarters, and at the moment of their arrival was knee-deep in boxes and packages, "an insignificant-looking little man, with a bilious complexion, large restless eyes and a nose which threw his chin completely into the background. The childlike expression of his mouth presented a remarkable difference from his other features, which were troubled and nervous."

Such was the author of the famous *Essay on Indifference,* to whom Victor was now introduced, and whose simple austere character at once won his esteem. Their relations soon became those of friends exchanging confidences rather than those of confessor and penitent; for the Abbé, realising that the young man had nothing serious on his conscience, was wise and honest enough to discourage him from inventing imaginary sins.

This friendship with Lamennais probably represents the highest point to which Hugo's Catholicism ever attained; even at this time he would have refused to surrender his reason entirely to the guidance of the Church. Yet in ideas and in conduct the most devout Catholic could not have been more strict than was the boy-poet in this early and most attractive phase of his career. Always susceptible to contrasts, he relates how chance brought it about that on the same day when he had lunched with two priests he dined between two actresses. For it happened that, on returning from the Duc de Rohan's, he found waiting for him at his lodgings the dramatist Soumet, who insisted on taking him to dinner that evening with Mlle. Duchesnois of the Théâtre Français. This *tragédienne,* the rival of Mars, was—it appeared—most anxious to meet an author whose poetry she admired so much. Victor was persuaded—reluctantly, for he felt in no mood for social intercourse—and found himself sitting at table between Mlle. Duchesnois and her friend Mlle. Leverd; Soumet and one or two others being also of the party. These ladies of the theatre, with their free and easy

manners and their *décolleté* attire, were quite a new experience to him: he was shocked to hear Soumet addressing them simply as "Duchesnois" and "Leverd," and always using the familiar *tu* and *te*. Naturally the two actresses, seeing what a prim and proper young man their guest was, set themselves in a spirit of mischief to tease and chaff him. On the whole, poor Hugo did not enjoy his evening at all and came away convinced that clerical society was far nicer than theatrical.

It will be seen that the poet's early prejudice against actresses was considerably modified by the charms of a certain lady to whom we shall come later; but, with this exception, it seems that his manner towards members of the profession was always rather distant and haughty. For the present he was glad to take refuge with the Abbé de Lamennais and the Duc de Rohan. He did not again stay with the latter at La Roche-Guyon; but some years later, in 1835, when he had become famous, he happened to be passing in that neighbourhood and was prompted by curiosity to revisit the place. The château had changed ownership, having been sold to the Duchesse de Liancourt. It was generally, however, open to the inspection of tourists, and Victor, presenting himself as a stranger, was shown over the rooms by a servant, who pointed out to him among others the room "which had been occupied by Victor Hugo," and which happened *not* to be the room. Before leaving, the visitor was asked to sign his name in the book kept for that purpose. As he turned over the leaves he found, to his surprise, that his name already figured there below a few lines in a small round handwriting. Feeling sure he could not imitate the writing or the signature, and that if he wrote his name he would be suspected of forgery, he contented himself with inscribing in the register the words "In se magna ruunt" and signing them with the name of their author, "Lucian." Curious episode in the history of autographs!

CHAPTER III

1821–1822

Life in an attic : Resumption of meetings with Mlle. Foucher : Visit to Dreux : A lover's devices : Hugo's love-letters : His first book : His pension and its legendary origin : Stendhal's opinion of Hugo : First copy of the *Odes* : Hugo's marriage

HUGO's material position was altered for the worse by his mother's death. The General, living away from Paris and so long separated from his wife that they had become strangers, was not much affected by that event ; at any rate, he did not attend the funeral, and a few weeks later he married the lady on whose account he had parted from Mme. Hugo. To Victor he wrote offering to make him an allowance provided that he would relinquish literature and adopt a more substantial profession. Refusing this condition, the son found himself flung on his own resources, that is, on what he could make by his pen. For a while he continued in the house where his mother had died ; then, after one or two changes, he settled himself in 30 Rue du Dragon, sharing there an attic with a cousin, Trébuchet, who had come from Nantes to study law. The attic was divided into two compartments—the sitting-room and a bedroom with two small wooden bedsteads. It was there that Victor made his first, and his only, acquaintance with poverty : the nature of his life in his *salon sous les toits* those will know who remember the hardships of Marius in *Les Misérables*. Weariness, disappointment, privation, slights real or imagined—" Marius learnt how you had to swallow all these, and how as often as not it is all you get to swallow. The

soul, in such cases, helps the body and even lifts it up; it is the only bird which supports its cage." Yet the young poet was not quite penniless, for he had—to go on with for an indefinite period—about thirty pounds which he had made by his writings. Nor was he shirtless, for he tells us that he owned three shirts—one for wearing, another in his chest of drawers, and the third at the wash. He possessed also a blue frock-coat for ceremonial occasions. He had some satisfaction also in feeling that he was becoming known, as appeared from invitations which reached him from time to time.

It was a still greater consolation to be assured of Adèle's love. To her his grief-stricken heart naturally turned. A strange incident served to link the sorrow of the present to the hope of the future. On the day of his mother's funeral, June 29, it had happened that Victor, after lingering in the cemetery until the gates were shut, and then wandering at a late hour forlorn about the boulevards, was moved by a sudden impulse to take the road home which led past the Hôtel Toulouse where the Fouchers had apartments. As he approached he noticed that their windows were lit up with unusual brilliancy. Curious to see what this meant he went up the great staircase to the first floor, and now heard above him the sound of music and dancing. A mirror showed him his own haggard face and crape-bound hat. Fascinated by the sense of incongruity, he mounted two more flights—the ground of course was familiar to him—and reached a point from which through a glass door he was able to look down on the ballroom. His eyes soon found the object of their search—Adèle—as she whirled round in the dance, smiling and happy. Filled with the luxury of grief he turned and went away.

The explanation of what he had seen was found to be that June 29 was the fête-day of M. Foucher, who had been giving a dance and theatricals for the benefit of his daughter. Owing to the estrangement between the

two families he had not heard of the dangerous turn in Mme. Hugo's illness, and he only learnt of her death on the morning of the 29th, when it was too late to put off the festivities. Adèle had been told nothing of it, and it was Victor himself who gave her the news when on the following day he met her as she was walking in the garden of the Conseil de Guerre. She was amazed and distressed beyond words; but from this time the prospects of the lovers grew brighter. A week or two later the Fouchers left Paris to stay at Dreux. Encouraged by the sympathy they had showed him on his mother's death, Victor—either to urge his suit, or at least to get a distant glance at Adèle—resolved to follow them. Having no money for coach-fares he went on foot, starting on July 17 and reaching Dreux on the 19th. From there he wrote this letter to his friend Alfred de Vigny:

"I am at Dreux. . . . I have walked here all the way under a blazing sun and over shadeless roads. I am dead-tired, but very proud of having done twenty leagues on my legs. I look at all carriages and carriage-folk with infinite pity; and if you were with me now, you would find me the most insolent biped you have ever seen. When I remember that Soumet requires a cab to go from the Luxembourg to the Chaussée-d'Antin, I am tempted to fancy myself of a superior nature to him—as animal. This experiment has proved to me that a man can walk with his legs."

As he wandered about the quiet streets of Dreux, his preoccupied look, his loose cravat, disordered hair, and dusty clothes soon attracted the notice of the police. They inquired his business and demanded to see his papers. Papers, forsooth! Of course he had never thought of that. He explained that he was a student, the son of a General, and was simply walking about to see the country. The sagacious officers were not to be taken in thus; they had orders to arrest any stranger who could not give a satisfactory account of

himself, and it was a case of "Follow me, young man." While being marched off to the police-station Victor happily remembered the name of a lady, an aunt of a friend of his, who lived at Dreux. He gave her name and was conducted to her house. She was kind enough to certify that she knew him and would be responsible for his respectability; so he was released. On the next day, walking about the place, he caught sight of M. Foucher and his daughter, but did not dare speak to them. Instead he wrote a letter which began: "Sir,—When I had the pleasure of seeing you in this place, I could hardly believe my eyes and wondered whether I was dreaming." He then went on to explain that by "a most extraordinary coincidence" he himself had come there on the invitation of a friend who lived near Dreux, and that "most unfortunately" the said friend happened to have left the day before. Under these circumstances he was anxious, of course, to return to Paris at once, but he had so many friends at Dreux who pressed him to remain, &c. After a few more of these transparent little fibs (one wonders whether they afforded matter for a confession to Lamennais) he ended with a statement of unimpeachable truth when he wrote: "I shall not be candid if I did not say that the unhoped-for sight of your daughter has given me the greatest happiness. I do not fear to avow it openly: I love her with all my soul, and in my utter sorrow and desolation it is only the thought of her that brings me any joy."

M. Foucher, who must have smiled as he read this letter, was touched by such devotion and persistence; he had always had a liking for Victor, and he admired the courage with which the young man was striving to make his way in the world. Hugo was allowed to call and plead his cause, with the result that Adèle's parents agreed to recognise the engagement on the condition that there should be no question of marriage until he

had secured a position. They were now allowed to see each other in the presence of a third person (who, one may suppose, had the good taste to be sometimes absent) and they were permitted to correspond.

During the interval of separation they had depended on casual meetings or on such indirect communication as Victor's ingenuity could contrive. Many a cryptic message of love had been consigned to the columns of the *Conservateur Littéraire*, if haply Adèle might read it and understand—an elegy, for example, on Raymond d'Ascoli, the disciple of Petrarch, who ended his life when parted from his lady. Another outlet of his feelings the lover found in his story of *Han d'Islande*. which he planned and partly wrote in the beginning of 1821. About this he explained later on :

"I desired somewhere to place the tumultuous agitations of my heart, my bitter regrets, my uncertain hopes. . . . I wished to describe a girl who might realise the ideal of all fresh and poetic imagination, the girl of my dreams—you, Adèle, my beloved. . . . And beside her I wanted to set a young man, not such as I am but such as I would wish to be."

But it was policy rather than sentiment which caused the appearance in the *Conservateur Littéraire* of a most appreciative review of a recently published *Manuel du Recrutement*. This work happened to be by M. Foucher, and Hugo, though he could hardly have known much about Army Recruiting, was sufficiently versed in the ways of the world to be sure that if your prospective father-in-law writes a book you cannot praise it too highly. M. Foucher, of course, received a copy of that number of the paper.

The necessity, however, for these various devices and stratagems, with which we all sympathise, disappeared when the engagement was recognised by Adèle's parents and eventually by General Hugo, who—though he relented on the subject of the allowance—seems at this time to have taken but slight interest

in the affairs of his family. And so the love-letters, the beginning and interruption of which have been recorded, were now resumed (October 5, 1821).

"Love-letters"—the same thing the world over, so precious to the persons concerned, to outsiders so monotonous. It may, indeed, be maintained without much fear of contradiction that the most interesting specimens of this sort are those which are the least sincere—some such elegant *persiflage*, let us say, as Prosper Mérimée carried on with Mlle. Jenny Dacquin. Hugo's letters, of course, are not at all like that: they are, as suited his age and character, earnest and genuine; they are all love as though the outside world existed not—love and life with Adèle, love and death without her, for the writer speaks often and seriously of ending his days, and touches at times a depth of pessimism which only a very young man can honestly indulge in. It is true that eminent persons in love, as in the measles, are wonderfully like other persons; yet this correspondence—or rather the part of it which we possess (for Adèle's letters to her lover were not preserved after their marriage)—forms an instructive document on many points of Victor's character. We see at a glance the man's ardent and masterful nature—a certain tone of proprietorship with which he at once takes spiritual possession of his future bride and signs himself "Ton Mari." Note also that, though he is but a youth of nineteen, he has already arrived at his own theory of conduct, quite independently of the opinions of the world around. It is a sound theory, though its manner of expression sounds somewhat priggish.

"A man should be *sage*," he says; "his purity is as essential as that of the woman. In expressing this view I am aware that it is not the view of society, which makes a distinction between what is permitted to the two sexes. Never mind: I have many other ideas of the same sort which I am quite content to have."

Elsewhere our young philosopher discourses on love

—"the only feeling," says he, "which cannot be exaggerated"—probably in reply to some doubts which Adèle had expressed about the permanence of his devotion to her:

"It is our souls which love, not our bodies; but the union of souls could not be perfect without intimate personal union. Therefore God has created the attraction of sex, and this shows that marriage is divine. The union of souls, ever young and imperishable, maintains the union of persons in old age and perpetuates it after death."

In this passage and others one may detect a foreshadowing of the superior and prophetic *rôle* which the Hugo of later years filled so continuously. It is almost a relief to find that he is capable of such a vulgar sentiment as jealousy. But he avows himself so, and characteristically defends and exalts that sentiment;

"I do not agree with the common opinion that jealousy is ridiculous. . . . I am convinced it is a part of the pure and exclusive love I bear you."

This *à propos* of men who looked admiringly at Adèle in the streets, and whom Victor threatens to knock down if he catches them doing so again. One way or another, too, the *fiancée* came in for a good deal of lecturing—more perhaps than some girls would have stood from their lover. For example:

"I wish you were less afraid of soiling your dress when you walk along the street. . . . I do not know whether your carefulness in holding it up is due to your mother's instructions. If so, I think her views very singular. For to me it seems that modesty is more valuable than a gown, though a great many women think otherwise. . . . I cannot tell you the suffering I endured yesterday and again to-day in the Rue des Saints-Pères from seeing passers-by turn to look at you, and perceiving that she whom I revere as I do God himself was the object, unconsciously, of impudent observation."

Doubtless Adèle explained to him the difficulty of handling skirts on a muddy pavement.

In May and June of 1822 the Fouchers were staying at Gentilly, and they invited Victor to come there; but though the lovers were together the letters still went on. In August Mme. Foucher was ill and Adèle had to sit up at nights to nurse her mother, at the risk of injuring her own health. For running this risk her lover remonstrates with her, half playfully, half seriously:

"Remember, my too unselfish Adèle, that in acting thus you are sacrificing *my* health and *my* repose. I desire that you should sleep every night, for otherwise how can I sleep knowing that you are keeping vigil. I appeal to you then to have pity on yourself out of pity for me. Call this egoism if you will, for in all that concerns you I am an egoist."

Needless to say that many of the letters contain those more or less earnest reproaches as to coldness, &c., which are necessary counters in the game of love; but Victor could never have had any real doubts about his sweetheart's devotion, since she even offered—if he could not obtain his father's consent—to leave her home and go away with him, thus forcing the family to agree to their marriage. Happily, no such heroic measure was necessary, for, as the year 1822 advanced, the prospect grew brighter. To begin with, Hugo's friends—notably Lamennais—were exerting themselves to procure him a Civil List pension; secondly, the poet brought out in June his first book, a collection of poems—several have already been mentioned—which had mostly appeared before separately, either in the *Conservateur Littéraire* or in *brochure* form, and which were now published in one volume with the title *Odes et Poésies Diverses*. It seems that he was urged to this venture by his friends, many of whom, like himself, belonged to the Société des Bonnes Lettres—an association for the spreading by literature of Royalist and

Catholic ideas. For Hugo's circle of acquaintance in the literary world had been growing rapidly. Besides Lamartine and De Vigny, one might mention Emile Deschamps, Jules Lefèvre, Mlle. Delphine Gay and her mother, and last—but not least interesting—a friend of Paul Foucher whom the latter brought one day to Gentilly: "A pretty boy with slim figure and flaxen hair, wide nostrils and lips of vermilion red. His face, of high colour and oval shape, was remarkable by the fact that the place of the eyebrows was taken by what seemed two semicircles of a blood-red tint. After dinner he entertained the company by a most lifelike imitation of a drunken man." This youthful decadent was Alfred de Musset, aged about thirteen.

Hugo's first book had some difficulty in finding a publisher. The commercial instinct fights shy of poetry, which it regards as dead stock. And yet there had been some notable verse published lately in France—in 1819 André Chénier's *Poésies*, in 1820 Lamartine's *Méditations*, in 1822 De Vigny's *Poèmes*, and now these *Odes*.[1] The little volume took its chance unaided by any adventitious attractions. It was in *duodecimo* form, printed on a muddy-grey paper, in poor type and unconspicuous binding. Nor was it much displayed in the shop-fronts. Abel Hugo, much interested in his brother's work, was urging a bookseller to give it a show in his window. "Why," exclaimed the tradesman in indignant surprise, "if I did so, it would be taking up the place of a book!" Nevertheless, the *Odes* sold fairly well. One of the first purchasers was King Louis XVIII.'s reader, and His Majesty not only had the poems read to him, but read them himself and annotated them critically. Naturally he was best pleased with the ode referring to himself, in the margin of which he wrote "*Superbe*"! The edition, consisting of fifteen hundred copies, the

[1] The majority of these were incorporated afterwards in the *Odes et Ballades* (1825).

price being 2 francs 50, was sold out in four months' time, and the author realised 750 francs. There was a preface, of course, but one remarkably short and to the point, very different from that momumental verbosity into which Hugo's prefaces swelled as time went on. The most important sentence of it runs thus:

"In the publication of this book there are two intentions—one political and the other literary; but in the author's mind the former is the consequence of the latter, for the history of men has a poetic aspect *only when judged from the elevation of monarchic ideas and religious beliefs.*"

There we have, in a phrase, Hugo's standpoint at this time. It cannot be pretended that his book created anything like the impression made two years before by the *Méditations,* but it was warmly and gratefully acclaimed in Royalist *salons.* To it, no doubt, the poet mainly owed the pension of 1000 francs which the King ordered to be paid him henceforth from his privy purse, and which came most opportunely in view of his desired marriage. About the origin of this pension there is another more romantic story which has long taken its place among the most pleasing of Hugo's legends. In 1822 a school friend of Victor's, Delon by name, had been concerned in the Saumur conspiracy, and having fled had been condemned to death in his absence. The young poet, deeply distressed for his friend—though, of course, with no political sympathy for him—wrote through the post to Delon's mother offering her fugitive son a refuge in his own lodgings, "where," said he, "they will never think of looking for him, since they know how staunch a Royalist I am." Nothing came of the letter, and the incident passed out of Hugo's memory until it was recalled to him three years later in a conversation with M. Roger, the Postmaster-General, who was also an Academician.

"By the way," said M. Roger, "do you know how you came to get your first pension—the one in 1822?"

"I always thought it was meant as a reward for my modest services to literature."

"Oh no! Do you remember having a friend called Delon?"

"Yes, the man who was sentenced to death as a conspirator."

"Exactly so. And do you remember, at the time he was fleeing from justice, writing to his mother and asking her to forward your letter to him, offering him a shelter under your roof?"

"Why, yes, I did; but how do you know anything about it?"

"Wait a moment and I will show you," said the Directeur des Postes; and he sent for a file of documents, one of which he took and handed to Victor, who was amazed to find it an exact copy of his letter.

"What!" he stammered, "what on earth does this mean?"

"It means, my innocent young friend, that when you write to a conspirator whom all the police of France are in search of it is very unwise to drop your letter into the post."

"So you kept my letter, did you?"

"Not at all. We merely made a copy of the letter, then resealed it and sent it on to its destination."

"So that my letter was used as a trap, and Delon would have thought me an accomplice in the scheme! How horrible, how vile!" Hugo exclaimed.

"You need not distress yourself. Delon was not in France at the time, so it was impossible for him to come to your house. No harm was done, you see, and on the contrary the only result was a good one. For the King, when your letter was brought before him, said: 'That is written by a fine young fellow, and does him credit. I shall give him the next pension that falls vacant.'"

Such is the story, authentic, no doubt, in every detail as regards the incident—for sympathy with the

outlawed and the oppressed was always one of Hugo's most amiable virtues—but that the Delon affair had anything to do with his pension is difficult to believe. Louis XVIII. had never been chary of recognising literary merit. Lamartine, Soumet, and others had already been rewarded, and what was more natural than that the Royalist poet *par excellence*—the man whose verse had mourned the death of the Duc de Berri and hailed the birth of the Duc de Bordeaux—should receive his mark of favour? That Victor was, in fact, now regarded in France as the most representative poet of his party is attested by a remark in one of Stendhal's letters. "The *Edinburgh Review*," he writes, "is quite mistaken in supposing that M. de Lamartine is the poet of the *ultras;* the real poet of that party is M. Hugo. This gentleman has the same sort of talent as Young, the author of *Night Thoughts*. It cannot be denied that he is a very clever verse-maker; unfortunately he is *somniferous*."

Such was the opinion of the sardonic Stendhal—an opponent, of course, of the existing *régime* and a devoted Bonapartist, but a fairly acute judge of tendencies. As to his comparison of Hugo with Young and his epithet *somnifère*, that is not perhaps a very happy criticism; but it must be remembered that the author of *Le Rouge et Le Noir* was always the slave of a few pet adjectives, mostly depreciatory.

On the day when the *Odes* were published Victor sent the first copy to Mlle. Foucher with this dedication: "A mon Adèle bien-aimée, l'ange qui est ma seule gloire comme mon seul bonheur. Victor." This *premier exemplaire*, which may be seen in the Hugo Museum—an unimposing little book, on paper of poor quality and in coarse blue boarding—had an eventful history. It was lost apparently in one of the poet's many moves, and nothing was known of it. But when, long after Hugo's death, his belongings were being collected in the Place des Vosges, a stranger wrote to the late Paul Meurice, who

was in charge of the work, saying that he possessed what might be an interesting relic and offering to send it. The offer was gladly accepted without the least idea that the relic in question was so precious a one as the first copy of Hugo's first book. The stranger professed to have got it from a lady who had given it to him in exchange for a copy of Bouillet, of which he possessed two.

Being now, thanks to his pension, "passing rich on £40 a year," and having devoted the £30 realised by his book to purchasing for Adèle a cashmere shawl (without which in those days no bride's outfit was complete), Victor persuaded the Fouchers that there need be no further delay of his marriage with their daughter. He also obtained the formal consent of his father, necessary in the case of a minor; and some polite correspondence passed between the General and M. Foucher, in which the latter offered—for the present and until they should be able to start a house on their own account—a home to the young couple under his roof. This kindly, if rather uncomfortable, arrangement was accepted for the sake of economy.

And so, at last, love and constancy triumphed over all obstacles. The last of the love-letters is dated October 4, and the marriage took place on October 12, 1822, the religious service being held at Saint-Sulpice, in that same Chapel of the Virgin where sixteen months before the last rites had been celebrated over Victor's mother. The bridegroom's "witnesses," as shown by the register, were his friend Alfred de Vigny and his old schoolmaster Biscarrat of the Pension Cordier days. It is a remarkable fact that, when dictating his memoirs (*Hugo raconté, &c.*), the poet gave the names of his witnesses as Ancelot and Soumet. This lapse of memory (as M. Biré remarks), though less grave than that of pious Æneas who amid the flames of Troy forgot even the name of his wife, is yet sufficiently strange to illustrate how cautious we have to be in accepting

Hugo's statements about himself. General Hugo, who was at Blois, did not attend the wedding, but he came to Paris on the following day in consequence of a terrible event which flung a dark shadow over an occasion otherwise full of joy. At the wedding dinner, which was held in a large room adjoining the Fouchers' apartments in the Hôtel Toulouse, it was noticed that Eugène Hugo's manner was strange and his speech incoherent. His brother Abel and another sitting near got him away from the table without attracting attention and took him home. Next morning the poor fellow was found in a violent fit of madness. The crisis passed, but Eugène never recovered his health and had eventually to be kept in a home for cases of mental affliction until his death in 1837. This sad affair, which brought General Hugo to Paris, seems also to have drawn him closer to his youngest son; their relations, at any rate, became more cordial than hitherto. The old soldier had been bitterly disappointed that his sons did not follow his own profession, but now perhaps he recognised that Victor had chosen the career in which he would distinguish himself most. The General was also, we may well believe, quite pleased with the charming daughter-in-law who had joined his family. We find Victor, shortly after his marriage, writing to his father in this affectionate strain:

"Your angelic Adèle joins her expressions to mine. She would like to write to you herself if she dared; but now that we two are but one, my heart has become hers for you."

CHAPTER IV

1822–1827

Han d'Islande and its critics : So-called " editions " of Hugo's works : The *Muse Française* : Nodier's *Salon* : *Nouvelles Odes* : Hugo's waning Royalism : Consecration of Charles X. : Visit to Lamartine : Tour in Switzerland : *Bug-Jargal* : *Odes et Ballades* : Sainte-Beuve's criticism : The Austrian insult and the *Ode à la Colonne* : The turning-point in Hugo's opinions

After their marriage the young couple lived at first, as arranged, with the Fouchers. At the end of 1822 a second edition of the *Odes* appeared, with a preface in which the ineffectiveness of French lyric poetry was attributed to the excessive use of apostrophe, exclamation, and other rhetorical devices. In February 1823 *Han d'Islande* was published anonymously. The sentimental origin and interest of this tale have been already referred to; it claims attention also as Hugo's first effort in fiction. " My romance," says he, " was a drama, the scenes of which were *tableaux,* while description took the place of stage-setting and costumes. The characters were left to describe themselves by their own words and actions, that being an idea which I had got from the novels of Walter Scott."

Another idea due to the same source was, no doubt, the prominence of " local colour," obtained in this case by a study of works on the subject. But besides Scott there is another influence evident in *Han d'Islande*—that of the once-famous if now forgotten Maturin, that high priest of horror whose *Bertram* and *Melmoth* enjoyed such a vogue in the beginning of last century. Nearer home, Victor had before him other specimens of the same style in Nodier's *Smarra* and *Les Vampires,*

which were probably intended as a skit on the *genre frénétique*. But Hugo was not the man to take things skittishly, and if he imitated these models he outdid them in gruesomeness, with the result that the horrific becomes the merely ludicrous and fails altogether of its effect. Who would not laugh rather than shudder when he reads of a monstrous hero who feeds on human flesh and drinks from a skull a blend of human blood and sea-water? Indeed, Hugo's first novel is very far from the excellence of his first poems, doubtless because fiction requires some knowledge of the world and of the possibilities of things, whereas poetry is not fettered by such requirements. Kindly critics like Nodier and Méry could find grounds for praise and promise for the future in the author's erudition, his power of narrative, his picturesque and vivid style; but the majority of the critics were anything but kindly. One of these dreadfully smart people wrote: "We are told that genius and madness are near akin: if it be so, we may safely say that the author of *Han d'Islande* comes very near to genius."

And yet, given all its extravagance and immaturity, this book has a distinct interest for those students of Hugo who can discern in some of its characters and situations a rough sketch—so to speak—of what eight years later became a finished picture in *Notre Dame de Paris*. Spiagudry, alike in appearance and in character, is a prototype of the famous Gringoire; Lieutenant d'Ahlefeld foreshadows the dandified Captain Phœbus; the Governor of Drontheim ordering his secretary to read out to him the petitions addressed to the Government reminds us of the well-known scene in *Notre Dame* between Louis XI. and his barber Olivier le Daim.

Han d'Islande, however—to return to 1823—did not sell quite so rapidly as Nodier had predicted from its nightmare qualities. There was, also, a pretty quarrel between the author and his original publishers, who, though insolvent at the time, protested against the

issue of a so-called second edition of *Han d'Islande* by another firm while there remained—as they declared—in their warehouse five hundred unsold copies of the first edition.[1] These vexations must, however, have been counterbalanced by the grant of a second pension—this time of 2000 francs from the Ministry of the Interior—which was made in February 1823, and on the strength of which Hugo and his wife, leaving the Fouchers, took rooms of their own in 90 Rue de Vaugirard. Here, in August, a baby boy was born who only survived two months, and whose death is the subject of the ode *A l'ombre d'un enfant*. Here, also, some close and lasting friendships were formed—with Dévéria the painter, with his pupil Louis Boulanger, and others of the Romantic school of art; more especially with the family of Nodier, who about now became librarian at the Arsenal, and whose kindly appreciation of *Han d'Islande* had opened the way for intimacy; while close by in the Rue de Vaugirard lived Sainte-Beuve, not yet an acquaintance but soon to become for a while the poet's greatest ally. Hugo, after publishing his novel, returned to poetry and criticism. In the course of 1823 he wrote quite a score of fresh odes, two of which—the *Ode à mon Père* and *La Bande noire*—appeared first in the *Muse Française*. To enumerate all the writers in this short-lived but brilliant periodical

[1] Figures about the editions of Hugo's works are not of much use. It would seem, for example, that *Les Orientales* went through no fewer than fourteen "editions" between January and February 1829, since in the collected works there are two prefaces to this book, one dated January and being that of the first edition, another dated February and professing to be that of the fourteenth edition. Fourteen editions of a volume of poetry in one month! That takes some swallowing. The mystery is further deepened by a reference elsewhere to the *Orientales* having reached their *sixth* edition in March 1830. We can only conclude that many of these so-called "editions" were bogus issues designed to impress the public, and were manufactured out of one single edition by making some slight change in the lettering or the binding. A trick of the trade, perhaps, but one which the great poet apparently accepted with complacence.

would fill a page; Victor's chief contributions to it were five critical articles (on *Quentin Durward*, on the *Essai sur l'Indifférence*, on Voltaire, on Byron, and on De Vigny's *Eloa*), all which, except the last, were republished—with alterations [1]—in *Littérature et Philosophie mêlées* (1834).

From the many contributors to the *Muse Française* a small inner group was formed—a kind of non-combative Romantic coterie, a mild forerunner of the *Cénacle* of 1829—devoted chiefly to the cult of the Middle Ages—to grim castles, fair *châtelaines*, pages, hermits, mendicants, minstrels, goblins, elves, familiar spirits, and all the rest. The presiding genius of this happy band was the gentle and ironical Nodier, who had already made many an excursion into the realms of the unorthodox. "Nodier's *salon*" it might be called, for it was at his house that these people most often gathered together, calling each other by their Christian names and indulging in a certain amount of harmless preciosity. In a literary sense they were quite catholic, having no quarrel with the Classics, but merely asserting the right of literature to find inspiration from every period of the world—from Christianity no less than from paganism.[2] How

[1] In the original essay on *Quentin Durward*, Napoleon is spoken of as a "blind giant with no understanding of the national spirit"; but ten years later Hugo had come to regard Napoleon as a beneficent destroyer of kings—a republican in disguise. And so he expunged all that passage. Again, writing in 1823, he attacked Scott for choosing from all the French kings such an unworthy one as Louis XI., "a truly English inspiration," says he. But in 1834, Hugo—having himself three years before made considerable use of Louis XI. in *Notre Dame*—felt that his criticism was ridiculous. Out, therefore, goes the whole sentence. Similarly, many passages in praise of Chateaubriand were deleted from the essay on Byron when it was republished. If one notes these little details it is not from any objection to Hugo's alteration of opinions, but because the articles in *Littérature et Philosophie* profess to be reprinted from the *Muse Française* "without any change"!

[2] Besides Nodier and Hugo, the other chief members of this group were Soumet, Guiraud, Jules de Rességuier—all three Southerners; Alfred de Vigny and Gaspard de Pons—both ex-officers; Emile Deschamps, Adolphe de Saint-Valry, and Mlle. Delphine Gay (afterwards Mme. de Girardin).

little Hugo himself was as yet prepared for raising any battle-cry may be seen from his preface to the *Nouvelles Odes* (1824), which establishes two points—first, that there already existed a rivalry of the so-called Classic and Romantic parties; and secondly, that in Victor's opinion there was no need for such rivalry since there was nothing to fight about. "He has no notion," he says, "what is the meaning of *le genre classique* or *le genre romantique;* for himself he finds that his admiration of Shakespeare and Calderon does not in the least impair his admiration of Racine and Boileau. The one reproach to which the great French poets of the seventeenth century are liable is that they limited themselves to pagan theology and to the history of Greece and Rome, when they might have found more inspiring themes in the religion of Christ and in the history of France." A patriotic and a religious impulse—that was as yet all that French romanticism meant. Even as concerned style and language Hugo was at pains to deny any departure from time-honoured models. To a critic, who in the *Journal des Débats* (June 14, 1824) had discovered in the *Nouvelles Odes* certain heretical metaphors, he replied at length, justifying his phrases by reference to Horace and Virgil as well as to French authors.

But if in literature this poet still believed himself a Conservative, there are several signs that in politics his devotion to the Bourbon family was beginning to wane. One may see this clearly in the *Ode à mon Père,* celebrating those heroes who had carried the flag of France to every country, while distinguishing between their glory and the personal ambition of the tyrant who had led them. Before long that distinction will fade away: "Bonaparte" will become "Napoleon," the "tyrant" a second Charlemagne. It was doubtless Hugo's reconciliation with his father which contributed most to this change of feeling; he tells us, too, that the Delon episode opened his eyes to the abuse of arbitrary government—though only the most innocent senti-

mentalism could imagine that any government would have acted differently. But this affair had occurred under the comparatively liberal rule of Louis XVIII. When that King died he was succeeded (1824) by his brother, and then Victor's alienation from royalty proceeded apace. Louis XVIII. had been at any rate a man of prudence, with a definite regard for popular rights, and, in spite of his gout, a saving sense of humour; Charles X. was—to condense the verdict of history—simply stupid.

But Hugo certainly had no personal cause for dissatisfaction at the outset of the new reign, for in April 1825 he and Lamartine were created Chevaliers of the Legion of Honour. At the same time he received an invitation, —or command—to attend the King's consecration, which was fixed for May 29. His journey to the ancient cathedral city of Rheims was made in company with Nodier and two others. Along the whole road from Paris, specially gravelled for this occasion, a ceaseless stream of vehicles poured, giving to country scenes all the animation of a crowded street. Having neglected to engage rooms at Rheims, the travellers would have found themselves obliged to encamp for the night in the open air had it not been for the kindness of one of the *pensionnaires* of the local theatre, who gave them up her sitting-room.

The ceremony next day was an imposing one. To an artistic taste like Hugo's it would certainly have seemed better to leave the cathedral walls in their severe simplicity than to decorate them with tinsel and pasteboard; but otherwise it was all very fine—the great nave filled with splendid costumes of men and women, the throne with princes and ambassadors at its steps, the peers of France on its right, the deputies on its left. Chateaubriand, of course, was there, rather contemptuous of the proceedings. "Trestles and a cheap-jack show—that is what it was," he said afterwards. "I should like to have seen the church unadorned, the King

on horseback, with two books open before him—the Gospel and the Charter, religion and liberty—instead of all this tawdry theatricalism. Why, they don't even know how to spend money to good effect. Would you believe it? There has been a sort of stable war between the King of France and the English Ambassador, and our King got the worst of it. Yes, the Ambassador's turn-out was so splendid that the King's carriage would have looked like a hackney cab beside it. So the Ambassador, when this was pointed out to him, was kind enough to ride in a more modest conveyance —out of pity for the King of France!" Naturally Chateaubriand, having been recently dismissed from office, was not in the mood to be pleased; and when, two days later, the King received in the cathedral the Chevaliers of the Order of the Saint-Esprit, some malign chance placed the ex-Minister next to his successful rival, M. de Villèle, the man who had ousted him from the Government. Unfortunately Chateaubriand's puny form did not lend itself well to the heavy ceremonial dress, and the best part of him—his head—was almost buried beneath a large plumed hat. Villèle, on the other hand, was a big handsome man who bore his court trappings well. Spectators could not but notice the contrast. "There stood the triumphant Minister," says Hugo, "quite happy and self-satisfied, looking at his fallen colleague without appearing to recognise him, with all the profound indifference and contempt of a man who possesses a portfolio for a man who possesses only genius."

While still at Rheims Victor composed the *Ode sur le Sacre,* which three weeks later he had the honour of presenting personally to the King. Lamartine also—though ill-health prevented him being present at the ceremony—had written his *Chant du Sacre,* and the same subject had inspired a multitude of minor pens. It was now that, in response to a long-standing invitation, Hugo paid a visit to his brother poet, who was

residing at Saint-Point near Mâcon; the visit being the first stage in a trip to Switzerland which Nodier, with his wife and daughter, and Victor, with Mme. Hugo and their infant Léopoldine, undertook together in the summer of 1825. The expenses of the excursion were to be paid for by a book describing the journey, which Nodier was to write with some contributions from Victor Hugo, and which was to be illustrated by a painter—M. Gué—who accompanied the party. The chief point was that an obliging publisher, Urbain Cauel, advanced the greater part of the money, and thus enabled the travellers to set forth with a light heart and a full purse. But the book, at any rate in its projected form, seems never to have been written. Nodier was dilatory, the engravings took a long time to prepare, and the publisher went bankrupt before the work was ready. Hugo, however, claims to have done his part, a specimen of which is given in the pages of *Hugo raconté,* describing the journey from Sallenches to Chamonix. In any case the tour was most successful, and the few days spent on the way at Saint-Point were enjoyed both by host (as Lamartine's correspondence shows) and by guests. Nodier was a delightful travelling companion, with all the store of quaint anecdote and ironical paradox for which he was famous. Thus at Essonne, where they stopped for refreshments, he explained the interest of the inn in which they were as being the place where Lesurques was captured; hence much talk on the "Lyons Mail" story and its unfortunate victim, whom Nodier had known personally.

"And then," he added solemnly, "there is another tragic event connected with this spot. As every one knows, a man is not always certain of being the father of his children; well, I maintain that a mother is sometimes liable to the same uncertainty."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed his hearers.

"You see that billiard-table in the next room," he

replied; "it was just two years ago that a party of nurses who had been to Paris to fetch babies for suckling were returning to Burgundy with the infants. While lunching in this inn they deposited the little creatures on that billiard-table. Meanwhile it happened that some countrymen strolled in to have a game, for which purpose they removed the babies from the table and deposited them indiscriminately on the seats round the room. When the nurses came back they were in a nice predicament: how was each to recognise her own particular charge, babies being all exactly alike? There was nothing for it but to trust to chance, and pick them up at random, with nothing to guide them except the distinction of sex. The result was that many a mother must afterwards have been fondling and caressing the child of some other woman."

"Really, now!" observed Mme. Nodier, "surely the babies' linen would have been marked?"

"My dear," replied her husband with his peculiar gravity, "if you once begin to inquire into probability you will never arrive at truth."

As they journeyed along—the Hugos in one carriage, the Nodiers in another, and the two vehicles constantly abreast—Victor grew enthusiastic over venerable churches, ruined castles, and other monuments of antiquity; he was indignant at the barbarism which would neglect, abolish, or rashly renovate such things, and this was the spirit which prompted him soon afterwards to write the little pamphlet entitled *Guerre aux Démolisseurs.* From Mâcon they diverged, as has been said, to Lamartine's house at Saint-Point. The poet, in his invitations to Hugo, had spoken of "cimes crénelées," "lierre touffu," "la teinte des ans," and other such picturesque features of his dwelling. Great, therefore, was Victor's surprise and disappointment to find a house with an ordinary tiled roof, not a vestige of ivy on its walls, and a yellowish whitewash instead of the "tint of years."

"But where is your house," he exclaimed, "the château of your poetry?"

"This is it," replied Lamartine, "only I have rendered it habitable. The thick ivy made the walls damp and gave me rheumatism, so I had it taken away; the grey stones had a depressing effect on me, so I have modernised the place. Ruins are good to describe, but very inconvenient to live in."

After a few days at Saint-Point the party continued their journey to Switzerland, reaching Lausanne, Geneva, and ultimately Chamonix. The mountains and valleys of that familiar region, seen now by the young poet for the first time, aroused an enthusiasm which expressed itself in many eloquent passages of his biography, notably that one in which he contrasts the eternal works of Nature with the perishable monuments of man. The travellers neither sought adventures nor met with any, except that a guide's mistake on the Mer de Glace brought Hugo for a moment into a perilous position. They went no further than Chamonix, and retraced their steps regretfully, calculating that they had just enough money to get them home; but on the way back they indulged their particular hobbies—Nodier for old and rare books, Hugo for architectural remains. Wherever they stopped, the first thing they did was to ply the hotel-keeper with eager and simultaneous questions on these points. Between the two the poor man was generally so puzzled that his replies were mixed and unsatisfactory. The enthusiasts grew impatient with him and with each other.

"I declare," said Nodier, "you have got Early Gothic on the brain."

"What about you and your Elzevirs?" retorted Victor.

When they reached Paris at the beginning of September, they had enjoyed themselves so well that of the £70 advanced to each by the publisher neither had so much as a sovereign left.

Early next year (1826) Hugo published his second romance, *Bug-Jargal,* unless more properly we ought to call it his first; for, as a short story, it had been written seven years before and had been inserted in the *Conservateur Littéraire.* It now appeared in an enlarged form, and with one or two additional characters, especially that of the dwarf Habibrah, who, in Hugo's gallery of monstrosities, is a successor to Hans of Iceland. The scene of the story is Saint Domingo during the slave revolt of 1791; its hero is a generous and faithful negro, whose soul is as white as his skin is black. The events are supposed to be related as a personal experience by Captain d'Auverney to his brother officers round a camp fire during the wars of 1793; and Habibrah's fate, as in his struggle with D'Auverney he hangs over a precipice, held for a few moments by the root of a tree, is evidently the author's first draft of the famous death-scene of Archdeacon Frollo in *Notre Dame.* Apart from this, it is doubtful whether *Bug-Jargal* was improved by being developed from a *conte* into a *roman,* with lengthy orations and interminable dialogues.

At the end of the same year we have a third volume of poetry, the *Odes et Ballades,* which was a reprint of some of the earlier odes together with additional ones—written in 1825—and with ten ballads. After saying that by "ode" he means a poem relating to some religious, personal, or contemporary subject, by "ballad" one dealing with some legend or popular tradition, the author in his Preface declares himself against any stereotyped distinctions in poetry. "What is really beautiful and true," he says, "will be so everywhere: what is dramatic in a novel will be dramatic on the stage; what is lyrical in a couplet will be lyrical in a strophe; in short, the only distinction in works of the intellect is between good and bad." Then follows a favourite analogy to illustrate the difference between *order* and *regularity.* "A Gothic cathedral presents admirable order in its simple irregularity. . . .

Regularity is the taste of mediocrity, order is the taste of genius. . . . The spirit of imitation is the scourge of art; let us admire the great masters, not imitate them. . . . The poet should have only one model—nature; only one guide—truth. Of all books two alone need to be studied by him, the Bible and Homer, which constitute two worlds for thought."

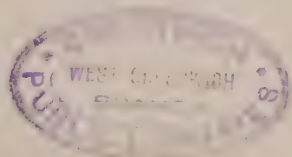
This protest against formalism, vague and innocuous as it appears, raised considerable criticism, mostly hostile. Hugo himself speaks of it as "hoisting the flag of freedom." But the most noteworthy criticism of the *Odes et Ballades* was one which dealt with the poems, not with the preface, and was written by Sainte-Beuve. Noteworthy, because the critic, while rendering full praise to the beauties of the Odes, sounded a note of warning about the dangers into which Hugo's talent might lead him. He detected already a tendency to over-description and a lack of reserve which, if not checked, might become the besetting sin of a poet so rich in language, in imagery, in fancy. "Let M. Hugo," he wrote, "guard himself above all things against the excess of his power and the abuse of his gifts; let him avoid the sort of brilliancy which dazzles and hurts; which has no sense of proportion, no gradation of colour, no knowledge of perspective, and devotes as much space to describing the folds of a mantle as it does to developing the noblest thought."

Sainte-Beuve was, of course, at this time only an unknown young man of twenty-three, not the great arbiter of taste he afterwards became; but it may safely be said that he never wrote a more just or prophetic appreciation than these two articles in the *Globe* of January 1827. At the same time his notice was kindly and often enthusiastic, so much so that the author, having ascertained who the critic was, called on him to express his thanks. Such was the beginning between these two eminent persons of a friendship, ardent while it lasted, in the course of which the critic lost himself

for a time in the admirer and Sainte-Beuve served as trumpeter-in-chief to Victor Hugo—so far as any delegation of that office was necessary.[1]

Politically the *Odes et Ballades* contain no indication of a change in the writer's opinions. But it was only a few weeks later that the event occurred which the poet in his later phases always assigned as the beginning of his break with royalism, and the starting-point of his career as a Liberal and Republican. At the restoration of the Bourbons Austria had stipulated that titles borne by French marshals which implied and recalled conquests over places in the Austrian Empire should be dropped. It was a delicate question, for the French Government did not dare publicly to enforce the agreement; and it was principally owing to the tact and goodwill of the Austrian Ambassador, Baron de Vincent, that unpleasantness had hitherto been avoided. But at the beginning of 1827 came a new Ambassador, Count Appony, presumably with instructions to bring the matter to an open issue. And so one evening at a reception at the Austrian Embassy, the Duc de Tarente, arriving to pay his respects, was amazed to hear himself announced simply as "Marshal Macdonald"; a few minutes later came the Duc de Dalmatie, whom in like manner the usher announced as "Marshal Soult." And while the two distinguished soldiers were still wondering at this substitution of their family names for their titles, the same thing happened to the Duc de Trévise and the Duc de Reggio, introduced respectively as "M. le Maréchal Mortier" and "M. le Maréchal Oudinot." Evidently this was no mere lackey's blunder, but a prepared insult. The aggrieved marshals withdrew in a body; the papers next day took up the incident; and it became the subject of questions in the Chamber of Deputies. Opportunely at this moment

[1] Hugo refers the origin of this friendship to the critic's interest in *Cromwell* some months later; but the above is Sainte-Beuve's version, and probably the correct one.



Hugo came forward with his *Ode à la Colonne,* those fine verses beginning

O monument vengeur, trophée indélébile!

spirited expression of patriotism and a proud assertion of the splendour of French arms. The ode, published in the *Journal des Débats,* was a fitting reply to the Austrian insult, but according to Hugo it was much more than that. He felt, says he, that he was no longer a Vendéan but a Frenchman; he realised a France greater than any political party—a France which would disown no part of its history. He accepted now not the Army only—as in the *Ode à mon Père*—but the leader of that Army, the Emperor; and he wrote now not "Buonaparte," nor even "Bonaparte," but "Napoléon." To the Royalist party and its journals, he declares, this seemed like a desertion: to attack Austria was in their eyes to attack the Bourbons, whom Austria had brought back to France; to glorify the Marshals was to glorify the Empire. Hugo, in fact, asks us to imagine him as standing forth to vindicate the honour of the Army, and thereby incurring the dislike and distrust of that party which, in its devotion to the Bourbons, rejoiced at any disparagement of Napoleon.

This pleasing theory does not, however, correspond to the easily ascertained facts of the time. The sentiments which the poet voiced in his *Ode à la Colonne* were those not of one party but of the nation. The slight put upon the chief officers of the Army was resented by all Frenchmen from the King downwards; among those who condemned it most outspokenly were some of the most conspicuous Royalists, and the Austrian Embassy was for some time socially boycotted. But Hugo ignores all this when it pleases him to fancy the incident as a foundation-stone from which the edifice of his future career rose steadily and consistently. "That was the date," he said proudly, speaking in the Legislative Assembly of 1850 as an advanced Republican,

with nothing but scorn and abuse for kings and princes —"that was the date when I first reached the age of intellectual manhood, and from that day to this my principles have never varied. In whatever I have said or written since then, I challenge any one to find a syllable inconsistent with the opinions I profess to-day."

Fine words, truly. Yet it needs no great research to show that their speaker did, between 1827 and 1848, say many nice things about and to royalties—those of his own country and others. Perhaps he may all the time have been a Republican at heart; if so, he managed to get along unembarrassed by his theories. In 1848, of course, he became an avowed Republican, as did the majority of his countrymen. Small blame to him for that. No one would find fault with a man simply for changing his political opinions, and no one doubts that Victor Hugo was always well abreast with the tendencies of the day. But why, not content with this, should he strive to make out that he had anticipated those tendencies? And why, when he had found salvation in Republicanism, should he henceforth brand as "monsters," "bandits," "tigers," "vampires"—and by other names even less polite—those unfortunate monarchs whom he had tolerated so long?

CHAPTER V

1827–1829

Hugo and Talma : History of *Cromwell* : The play and its preface : Death of General Hugo : The strange case of *Amy Robsart* : The final *Odes et Ballades* : Friends of 1828 : M. Bertin of the *Journal des Débats* : *Les Orientales* : *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné* : Question of capital punishment : Gautier's first impressions of Hugo : The " Cénacle " of 1829

THE Preface of the *Odes et Ballades* had, as mentioned, protested against certain conventional or technical distinctions in literature ; but it was another Preface, concerned not with lyric but with dramatic poetry, that associated Hugo with the last and most sensational phase of the " Romantic " movement, elevating him to the position of a leader and liberator—a Master surrounded by disciples of boundless zeal and devotion.

The idea of writing for the stage had come to him some six years previously, when, just after his mother's death, he was struggling to support himself ; and he had composed on the then fashionable subject of Amy Robsart a drama to the fate of which we shall refer presently. The play, however, had not been offered for production, partly because there were so many other adaptations of *Kenilworth* in the market, and partly because the author's success in lyric poetry diverted his thoughts from the theatre. So *Amy Robsart* was laid aside indefinitely, and meanwhile Hugo's dramatic ideas assumed a wider scope, when Baron Taylor, the Commissaire-Royal of the Théâtre Français, asked him why he did not write for the stage.

" I am thinking of doing so," was the reply, " and in fact I have begun a drama on the subject of Cromwell."

"Really?" said Taylor. "Well, I hope you will finish it quickly. A *Cromwell* written by you would be just the thing for Talma: he is the one man for the part."

Keen to put things in train, Taylor gave a dinner to which he invited, among others, both Hugo and Talma. The two were seated together, and had a most interesting conversation in which the famous tragedian lamented that, in spite of all his successes, he had never been given a "real" part to play—the part of a real and natural man. He was tired, he said, of the *tirades* and the *beaux vers* of the Classic and pseudo-Classic authors: "I ask for Shakespeare," he cried pathetically, "and they give me Ducis."

The poet then explained his own ideas—those which are expounded in the Preface of *Cromwell*—and the actor agreed cordially with him, becoming especially enthusiastic over some specimens Hugo quoted of local details and commonplace expressions, and exclaiming, "Ah! yes; that's right—that's what I want, that's the way people speak in real life." And the two did not part until a promise had been given to complete the drama as soon as possible. But before this could be done, Talma died; and as there was no other actor he fancied for the part Hugo gave up the idea of making *Cromwell* a stage-play, and composed it as a literary work—as a medium, in particular, for illustrating his views on dramatic construction.

Such, according to the poet himself, is the history of *Cromwell*. A certain difficulty arises about dates, for the chapter in *Hugo raconté*, describing the interview, clearly implies that it took place early in 1827—an implication inconsistent with the fact that Talma died in October 1826. The discrepancy, however—due to an ambiguous use of the word *alors*—by no means proves that the meeting and conversation are not authentic. Nothing is more likely than such an occurrence, unless it be that Hugo should have misdated it. His talent for inaccuracy in these matters is only

less remarkable than the prodigious memory which enabled him to reel off upon occasion—as in his *Letters from the Rhine*—page after page of obscure dates and jaw-breaking Teutonic names, all quoted (as he declares) without any reference to books. In *Hugo raconté,* on the other hand, dates are rare, and when they do occur are often wrong: it is quite common, after several chapters without any chronological landmarks, to come upon one which starts off cheerfully, "At the beginning of next year." We need not doubt, therefore, that Talma and Hugo did meet—probably in the early part of 1826—and discuss *Cromwell:* it is much harder to believe that an actor who had triumphantly played so many heroes of antiquity and who, in the opinion of his contemporaries, embodied the very spirit of classic tragedy, should have declared that he had never had a part which satisfied him. Yet even here—allowing for some exaggeration of his sentiments through the bias of the reporter, one may fairly suppose that Talma (as Dumas, who knew him much better than Hugo did, also testifies) was quite ready to welcome any new *rôle,* or kind of *rôle,* with possibilities of distinction. Doubtless he sighed for fresh worlds to conquer; as an actor he would not trouble about literary labels—he wanted to "make his effects," and if any young dramatist could give him the chance of a striking impersonation, he would care little whether that dramatist belonged to the old or the new school.

However that be, and whether or not there was ever any serious intention of staging it, *Cromwell* soon grew to dimensions which would have required several Talmas to deal with it. Published in December 1827, the play turns upon Cromwell's ambition for the crown —all the *pros* and *cons,* plots and counterplots, connected therewith. This is the one subject, and its unity is certainly well observed, since at the end of nearly 7000 lines the Protector is still wondering, "When, then, shall I be King?" Stranger still,

despite the fulminations of the Preface, the unity of time is not departed from and that of place only very slightly—though of course this conformance to Aristotelian rules is merely accidental. Weak in dramatic interest and in historical accuracy, *Cromwell* has some merit as a character-study and great merit as an exercise in style, containing as it does many fine lines and vigorous expressions. In two respects it would have seemed to contemporaries an innovation—in the occasional use of plain everyday language instead of the stereotyped circumlocutions of dignified drama, and in the introduction of grotesque or farcical scenes amid grave and serious situations. This mingling of the "kinds" was one of Hugo's main contentions in his Preface, as necessary in order to make the stage a faithful mirror of life. And it was the Preface rather than the play itself which at once attracted notice, taken—as it was meant to be—in the light of a manifesto.

After all that has been said and written on this celebrated document there is no need but to characterise it in the briefest way, for which purpose one cannot refrain from utilising once more Disraeli's well-worn aphorism about the new and the true. The Preface does indeed contain much of both, but what is new is not true and what is true is not new. The new and original part is Hugo's discovery of three stages of poetry corresponding to three ages of the world—lyric in primitive days, epic in antiquity, and dramatic in modern times; of these three the types and sources being respectively the Bible, Homer, Shakespeare. A wholly fantastic theory which requires us, among other things, to ignore the epic rather than the lyric character of the earliest books of the Bible, and to regard Greek poetry as exclusively epic, considering Pindar and the rest on the one hand, and all the dramatists on the other, as merely accidental offshoots from Homer. And since the writer lays special stress on recognition

of the grotesque and the farcical as distinguishing modern poetry from ancient, we are involved in the curious assumption that neither Greek nor Latin poets possessed a sense of humour and incongruity—or, at any rate, as it is worded, that "comedy, though not absolutely unknown to the ancients, was a timid and furtive thing always seeking to hide its head!" It must be confessed that the "timidity" of Aristophanes and Plautus is not very noticeable.

Such are a few of the absurdities in which we are landed by several pages of brilliant though unconvincing paradox. But when we leave these novelties and come to the second part of the Preface—that which deals with the principles of dramatic composition—we have nothing but admiration for Hugo's vigorous attack on the Unities of Time and Place. What he says is just and to the point; only he was not—as has often been supposed—the first person to say it. Schlegel (in his *Dramatic Literature*) had, twenty years before, pointed out that these "unities" belonged specially and solely to the conditions of the Greek theatre; Mme. de Staël (in *De l'Allemagne*) had ridiculed their artificiality; quite recently Stendhal (in *Racine et Shakespeare*) had completed their overthrow. What Hugo now did was to trample on the slain; still, he trampled with great effect. In the same way, when he pleads against the rigid distinction between Tragedy and Comedy, arguing that the two should be fused in true "Drama," which, as we see in Shakespeare, sets side by side the sublime and the vulgar and fears not to use the most homely language when such language is natural to the persons and their surroundings—in all this, Hugo follows and elaborates what both Mme. de Staël and Stendhal had already said. Not that, for a moment, the importance of the Preface to *Cromwell* is to be denied, providing that we assign to its importance the true reason—the form rather than the matter of what it contained. Others, writing with greater experience and

with perhaps more reflection, had arrived at the same conclusions; but what was their quiet philosophising compared to the wealth of rhetoric and imagery with which Hugo adorned his theme, and in the use of which he revealed himself a master of French prose? Never has the value of the emphatic style in polemical literature been better illustrated than in this glowing manifesto which—as Théophile Gautier said, speaking of himself and his friends—"came upon us with all the authority of the Tables of the Law delivered from Sinai."

Besides marking the date in his literary life at which he became a leader of men, *Cromwell* must have always had a melancholy personal interest for Hugo. The drama was dedicated to his father, who was now residing in Paris and on the most affectionate terms with his sons. Victor and his wife were constantly at the General's house in the Rue Plumet. One evening, January 28, 1828, a few weeks after the publication of *Cromwell*, the two had been dining with the General and his wife. They returned home about eleven o'clock, and half an hour later—just as Victor was undressing for the night—he was alarmed by a loud ring at his door. Hastening to open it, he found a messenger from his stepmother, who informed him that General Hugo was dead. He returned at once with the messenger to the house, and there saw the father, whom an hour ago he had left full of health and spirit, stretched out lifeless on his bed, killed by a stroke of apoplexy, as suddenly as he might have been laid low by a bullet on the field of battle.

The loss of his father had followed closely on the death, in December, of Mme. Foucher, so that Hugo and his wife were now in double mourning. This did not, however, interrupt for long the strenuous work in which he was involved. The sensation caused by his essay in dramatic criticism had been partly due to the opportune moment of its appearance just when interest

in Shakespearean dramas had been aroused by the performance of an English company at the Odéon, in September 1827. The triumphs of Charles Kemble and Miss Smithson were still in men's mouths ; Shakespeare, hooted down a few years before as " an aide-de-camp of the Duke of Wellington," had this time been rapturously applauded ; such was the condition of public opinion which the Preface of *Cromwell* expressed and emphasised. And it was, perhaps, the prevalence of this Anglophil sentiment which encouraged Hugo to make an experiment with his laid-by and almost forgotten drama of *Amy Robsart.* The episode is a little cloudy, and it cannot be said that the poet's conduct shines very brightly through the clouds. What happened was, briefly, this : Hugo's brother-in-law, Paul Foucher, a youth of seventeen who had just left college, was anxious to come out as a dramatist, but he was met by the beginner's usual difficulty—the fact of being unknown. Having heard somehow (Hugo says it was through Soumet) of the existence of this drama on *Amy Robsart,* he begged his brother-in-law to let him see it. Hugo gave him the MS. and said to him in effect : " This is an old thing of mine in which I have no further interest : I wrote it years ago, but I should not care now to produce what is simply borrowed from another author's work, as this is from *Kenilworth.* I don't regard it really as my own property : Scott is open to any one who wants to adapt him. By all means take the play, if it is of any use to you, and do what you like with it."

What Paul Foucher did was to take it to the Odéon, where the manager accepted it without demur and proceeded to give it a strong cast and a sumptuous mounting. Evidently the manager " knew something," and he imparted his knowledge to a good many other people. *Amy Robsart,* produced on February 13, was received chiefly with jeers and hisses, and was an unqualified failure. It had been billed anonymously, but, at the end of the last act, one of the players came

forward, according to custom, and announced that the drama was by—M. Paul Foucher. The papers next day hinted plainly at its real authorship, and Hugo at once wrote a letter to the Press, in which he said: "As this play, the first attempt of a young author whose success is dearer to me than my own, has met with so much opposition, I hasten to state that I am not entirely without a share in it. The drama contains a few words and some fragments of scenes which are by me, and I am bound to say that these are perhaps the passages which were hissed most. P.S.—The author has withdrawn his play."

This letter, apparently so magnanimous, was in fact a mere prevarication. No other impression can have been intended by it except that *Amy Robsart* was substantially Paul Foucher's work, excepting "a few words and fragments of scenes"; whereas the truth was that it had been written from end to end by Hugo, who seems to have remembered that convenient motto *Fiat experimentum,* and to have chosen as the *corpus vile* an unfortunate youth who had done nothing to the drama except put his name to it. Had *Amy Robsart* been a success, the credit no doubt would have gone to its real author. That the play was wholly his Hugo admitted some years later in his autobiography, though even there, with his usual inexactitude, he says that it was performed for several evenings and was then prohibited by the Government on account of the disorder and interruptions by which it was attended; whereas in reality it was performed only once and was then withdrawn—as he said in his letter at the time—by the author, that is, by himself.

So much for this ill-fated *ballon d'essai,* which during Hugo's lifetime was never printed, and of which he himself had evidently no high opinion. Whatever annoyance its failure caused him was soon forgotten amid other interests. He had found time to write some more odes, and in August (1828) he published

the definitive edition of his *Odes et Ballades*, containing 72 odes and 15 ballads, and divided into five books. The *Ode à la Colonne* was, of course, included, and among other new pieces are some of the most charming lines that Hugo ever wrote—simple, unpretentious poems, such as *Le Portrait d'un Enfant, A une Jeune Fille, Son Nom, Encore à Toi,* &c. The ode entitled *A mon ami S-B* attests the warm friendship now existing between the poet and the critic—or rather, between the two poets, for Sainte-Beuve as "Joseph Delorme" and the author of the *Consolations* was himself no inconsiderable poet. Deeply as he was influenced by Hugo, it is likely enough that his own services to "notre grand Victor" (as he calls him) were numerous. As an expert in early French poetry he may often have been able to suggest to his friend the revival of certain metres belonging to the days of Ronsard and the Pleiad, as well as that free use of the cæsura and the *enjambement* which the poet began about this time to practise with such skill and success.[1]

The Hugos had now moved to 11 Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, where they were close to Sainte-Beuve, who, with his mother, lived at No. 19, and was constantly in and out of his friends' house, or writing letters—often in verse—to Victor and his wife. Other constant visitors at No. 11 were Emile Deschamps, Louis Boulanger, Adolphe Saint-Valry; and hardly an evening passed without a small gathering at which the master of the house recited some verses he had composed during the day, and the conversation ran on literature and art. Among those who looked in occasionally was Prosper Mérimée; and it was he who introduced Victor to the

[1] M. Biré points out that in the *Chasse du Burgrave*, for example (written in 1828), an old lyrical device of the sixteenth century is reintroduced, which was admired by Hugo's enthusiasts as a novelty—the repetition of the last syllable to give the effect of an echo, *e.g.*:

"Mon page, emplis mon escarcelle,
Selle,
Mon cheval," &c.

salon of two English ladies—the Misses Clarke—where he met Benjamin Constant, now a picturesque old man, and Henri Beyle (Stendhal), dandified and sententious. One of the *habitués* of this society was Delacroix, the leader of the "Romantic" school of painting, who one evening championed vigorously the beauty of Voltaire's *Tancrède* against Hugo's depreciation of it. The elder of the Misses Clarke, who fully agreed with Delacroix on this point, exclaimed, as soon as he had left the room, "What a charming man M. Delacroix is! How witty! What a pity that he is a painter!"

And besides these evenings among literary folk, many a day during that fine summer of 1828 was spent by the poet in excursions and rambles through the neighbourhood of Paris; many a sunset and twilight did he watch and dream over, gathering impressions soon to be translated into vivid verse. Already he had discovered the charms of the view from the towers of Notre Dame; and fond always of exercise, and especially of climbing to heights, he would often drag his panting friends up the steep ascent to that summit from which they could behold beneath them the panorama of the city with all its suggestion of history and romance. Another favourite resort was the suburb of Brinvilliers, where M. Bertin, the editor-in-chief of the *Journal des Débats* had a pretty house and grounds. Here at Les Roches, as it was called, Victor met several journalists—useful acquaintances for an author—and here he laid the foundation of his life-long friendship with Jules Janin. Bertin himself was a man of large hospitality and original character. Content with the great influence of his paper, he remained untouched by any personal ambition, either social or political: he cared only for the society of talent. Perhaps he carried journalistic independence even to an extreme, as when, a few years later, he refused a visit from King Louis-Philippe. That sovereign, thinking to be agreeable to the influential

editor, suggested that he would like to come and see his country house. This honour, however, Bertin declined, giving as his reason to the bearer of the proposal : " The King is very comfortable at Versailles, and I am very comfortable at Les Roches : if he comes here, we shall both be uncomfortable." In the same spirit, one day when Guizot called on him in Paris about some important matter, the editor, who happened to be dining at the time, requested the Prime Minister to wait until he had finished dinner or to call again. Such was Bertin, with whom and his family the Hugos spent many pleasant weeks during several successive summers. His own family now numbered three : besides the daughter Léopoldine (" Didine " by her pet name) there were two boys—Charles-Victor (" Charlot "), born in 1826, and François-Victor (" Toto "), born on October 21 of this year (1828).

Amid this life, centred in home affection and extending to an ever-widening circle of friends, Hugo was busily occupied in work which, while a pleasure, was also in view of his increased responsibilities a necessity. We gather from his letters that his financial position had benefited very little from his father's death. There was some house-property at Blois which the step-mother disputed with the sons, some unsaleable land elsewhere, and the bulk of the General's estate which was in Spain the Government of that country had sequestrated ; the result being that (in Victor's words) " there is little or nothing to be got out of these fragments except endless lawsuits and worries." Writing to Saint-Valry on December 21, 1828, he says : " If the friend you think so lazy has not written to you, it is not because he was doing nothing, but because he was doing too much. . . . I am working day and night, and instead of a letter I shall be sending you next month a volume of prose and one of verse."

The books referred to are *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné* and *Les Orientales*, the latter of which was

published first (January 1829) A blaze of light and colour, a masterly manœuvring of language, an unrivalled display of effects in rhythm and rhyme—in short, a triumph of form. What else is there to say, at this date, about so well-known a book? Nothing; except, perhaps, that it suggests the inveterate question—applicable to most of Hugo's work—whether the splendid superstructure reposes on any depth of feeling or thought. Rather a futile question; for nothing is more perilous, uncertain, and at the mercy of individual judgment than an attempt to distinguish between the form of poetry and its soul. That, at any rate, was not the tone of contemporary criticism which—as far as it was hostile—was directed quite stupidly against a metrical inventiveness that seemed revolutionary; but the bulk of opinion was favourable, even enthusiastic, in spite of Hugo's complaints of unfair treatment. His *Odes* might have suffered by a comparison with Lamartine, but Lamartine had written nothing like this. Coming at any time these brilliant miniatures ("The Fire from Heaven," "The Pirates' Song," "The Spirits of Evil," &c.) would have attracted admiration; coming at a moment when public interest was fixed on the struggle between Greek and Turk, and dealing as many of them did with the events of that struggle, *Les Orientales* exactly fell in with popular sentiment; and none the less so because of the *Lui* which ends the volume—the great He—the all-pervading atmosphere of Napoleon. (*Tu domines notre âge; ange ou démon, qu'importe?*)

Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné, which appeared three weeks after *Les Orientales* and was at first published anonymously, was regarded by Hugo as the beginning of his life-long crusade against capital punishment. He has related how, on two or three occasions before this, the subject had been brought under his eyes: first, when as a lad of eighteen he saw Louvel, the murderer of the Duc de Berry, going to his

doom; again, when he witnessed in the Place de Grève the execution of a parricide amid the jeers of a mob which came to the scene as to a play; and once again, when he saw the executioner "rehearsing" one morning for the business of the day, by greasing the slides of the machine to make the knife move smoothly—and doing this in a public thoroughfare before a crowd of interested onlookers. These sights had filled him, he says, with horror and disgust; he realised the iniquity of a system which requites evil by evil, and he resolved to champion the cause of Right and Mercy.

No doubt this account represents correctly the origin of Hugo's feelings about the death penalty—an origin which, it may be noted, was wholly sentimental and connected with the accidents of the thing rather than the thing itself; but it seems certain that *Le Dernier Jour*, which in most picturesque and poignant fashion describes the thoughts and emotions of a well-educated criminal during the last twenty-four hours of his life, was written in the first instance with an artistic purpose, not a moral or practical one: it was, in fact, a study in morbid psychology in accordance with the prevalent mode of a time when writing and conversation both tended to turn on "graves and worms and epitaphs." Three years later, when one of those periodical waves of sentiment which temporarily submerge common sense was sweeping over France, Hugo prefixed to the fifth edition of his book (1832) a preface intended to constitute the work "a general and permanent pleading in favour of all accused persons, in the present and the future." And to this subject we find him returning again and again—in books, in speeches, in personal appeals to the authorities of his own and other countries. Always his protest was against the exercise by society of a vulgar vengeance upon the individual—for whose crimes it was itself responsible—and on behalf of what he called "the sacred inviolability of human life." By one of these propositions he begged

the question, by the other he asserted a truism which cut both ways and was obviously liable to the witty retort, "Que Messieurs les assassins commencent." And in all his efforts for a cause he made peculiarly his own, Hugo appealed to sentiment rather than to reason, and used as his weapon rhetoric rather than logic.

But the success of these two books, coming close upon one another, and each in its way a masterpiece of style, increased the admiration of Hugo's younger followers to little short of fanaticism. It was shortly after the appearance of *Les Orientales* that Théophile Gautier, who had hitherto worshipped "the Master" at a distance, was given an introduction by Gérard de Nerval or Petrus Borel. He has described in his own inimitable fashion with what nervousness he mounted the stairs to Hugo's flat, how he twice retreated, and only at the third attempt mustered courage to knock at the door, and how after all he was received quite simply and kindly. He has left on record also a familiar sketch of Victor's appearance at this time, in which we read of "a forehead rising like some marble monument above that serene and earnest countenance—a forehead of almost superhuman beauty, within which the deepest thoughts might lie written, and which might have worn the coronet of gold or the chaplet of laurel with the dignity of a god or a Cæsar. Framing this splendid brow was a wealth of rich chestnut hair, falling to a considerable length behind. The face was closely shaven, and its exceptional pallor was relieved by a pair of hazel eyes, keen as an eagle's. His attire was neat and faultless—black frock-coat, grey trousers, and small turn-down collar, with an ample bow-tie," &c. Such was the Hugo of 1829 of whom David d'Angers executed a medallion and whose features were now becoming familiar to the public through the excellent lithograph portrait of Dévéria exhibited in the printsellers' shops.

It was, however, chiefly in the select circle of which he was the centre that the young and handsome poet, grave already with the becoming sense of a "mission," was received with a rapturous homage hard to be realised from our distant and colder view-point. Strong indeed were the fumes of incense at these gatherings held generally either in Hugo's rooms or Nodier's. The adepts of Romanticism formed a brotherhood which met to hear and admire each other's works, to discuss literature and mediæval art. This "Cénacle" of 1829, like its predecessor of 1824, was based on the great principle of "You stroke my back and I'll stroke yours"; only, in this case, a consciousness of mutual merits was subordinate to the universal recognition of one supreme Master and High Priest before whom all bowed low. Nor were the ordinary words of praise adequate to convey the ecstatic feelings of this select company: a vocabulary of their own apart from the vulgar was necessary. "And so when Hugo had recited some verses he had just composed, he was greeted with no commonplaces such as 'admirable,' 'splendid,' 'magnificent' —the habitual compliments paid to any mediocrity. Nay, what happened was this: First a few moments of religious silence; then, from some corner of the room, a voice tense with emotion would ejaculate the words 'A Cathedral!'; another would exclaim 'A Gothic arch!'; a third 'An Egyptian pyramid!' And soon all the company would be repeating in chorus these magic words."

Thus wrote Mme. Ancelot (*Les Salons de Paris*) of scenes which she had witnessed.

Yet laugh as we may at the absurdities of these young enthusiasts, it must be confessed that seldom has there been a group of men so many of whom were either already distinguished or destined to distinction of different kinds. Balzac, De Vigny, Delacroix, Dévéria, Sainte-Beuve, De Musset, Villemain, Mérimée, Alexandre Dumas—these are only a few of them,

though a sufficiently typical selection. Occasionally, but not often, for he was little in Paris, Lamartine was of the company; then between him and Hugo honours were nearly easy. And this society, besides its definite hero-worship, differed also from the earlier one by a more aggressive tone and a less disguised contempt for whatever remained of Classic taste.

Romanticism—which Stendhal with blunt common sense described as the "art of presenting to people the literature that in their existing state of mind gives them most pleasure," which might even more simply be called the change from the ideals of the eighteenth century to those of the nineteenth—had by now worked itself out peacefully in literature and the arts. In drama alone, especially in the official centre of drama, the Théâtre Français, old traditions still held their own; and against this stronghold of rusty prejudice, as it seemed, the young men of 1829 directed all their animosity, protesting that they had had enough of Racine and far more than enough of the later and feebler imitators of Racine. To their chief—to the author of the Preface of *Cromwell*—they naturally turned as a leader. It was true that two successful inroads upon the citadel of classic drama were already being made—for it was Hugo's perverse fate always to come *after* some one else—by Dumas' *Henri III.* and by De Vigny's *Othello;* but still one of these was only in prose and the other was only a translation. The way was still open for an original masterpiece in verse, which might complete and consecrate the revolution of taste. Nor was Hugo backward in responding to the call of his followers; in fact, he had been meditating on two subjects for a drama, and the one which he chose first was *Marion Delorme.*

CHAPTER VI

1829–1830

Marion Delorme : Its interdiction : Hugo's appeal to the King : Rehearsals of *Hernani* : Preparations for the first night : The play : Criticisms upon it : Its importance : The July Revolution : *Idées d'un Révolutionnaire de 1830* : Hugo's political opinions

BEGUN on June 1, *Marion Delorme*—or, as it was first called, *Un duel sous Richelieu*—was completed in twenty-four days, the whole of the fourth act having been written between the morning of June 20 and that of June 21. Hugo invited a large circle of friends to hear him read his play—the central interest of which is the pure devotion of a repentant courtesan—and it was received with even more than the usual enthusiasm. Among those present was Baron Taylor, who lost no time in securing the first refusal of it for the Théâtre Français. He did well to be prompt, for the rumour of the reading soon got abroad, and hardly had the thing been settled when a letter came from the manager of the Porte-Saint-Martin offering his theatre and a strong cast; and close on this followed a personal visit from "a gentleman in black frock-coat and white trousers, with enormous whiskers"—Harel of the Odéon—who would take no refusal, and when told that the drama was to be read next day before the committee of the Français for their approval, exclaimed: "A reading! why so? Here am I quite willing to accept it without looking at it." And forthwith he took a pen and wrote on the back of the MS. which was lying on the table the words, "Accepted for the Odéon Theatre, July 14, 1829."

"Ha!" he added, "July 14—anniversary of the taking of the Bastille; well, I'll take my Bastille now."

So saying he laid hold of the MS. and with difficulty could be made to relinquish it. Rare and flattering experience for a young author to have theatrical managers tumbling over each other's heels in their anxiety to secure his play! Equal success attended the formal reading before the committee of *sociétaires;* but when *Marion Delorme* came to be dealt with by the censors the trouble began. The fourth act, in which Louis XIII. is represented as a mere slave of "the Red Cardinal"—chafing at the yoke but afraid to throw it off—was objected to chiefly because in the then state of public feeling it was certain that—without any such intention of the dramatist—spectators would see in the earlier King a portrait of his descendant, their present priest-ridden Charles X. The objection of the censors was sustained by Martignac, the Minister of the Interior, to whom Hugo applied in vain. There remained an appeal to the King himself, and His Majesty was graciously pleased to grant the poet an audience at Saint-Cloud, which lasted nearly an hour and is narrated picturesquely in *Les Rayons et les Ombres* (the piece entitled *Le 7 août 1829*), and soberly in the autobiography. King Charles was as kind as could be, and was quite willingly to take the incriminated act, which Victor left with him, and to read it for himself. He felt bound, however, after doing so, to uphold the decision of his Minister; at the same time, to soften the blow, he caused the author to be informed soon afterwards that another pension of 2000 francs would be granted him. This offer Victor declined in a letter (addressed to the Minister of the Interior) in which, while lamenting gently his own disappointment, he speaks most respectfully and gratefully of the King's goodness to him—not forgetting, however, to hint that the kindness was not all on one side.

"My family," he writes, "noble since 1531, is an old

servant of the State. I myself have perhaps been fortunate enough to render some humble service to the King and to royalty. I have sold five editions of a book [*i.e.* the *Odes et Ballades*] in which the name of Bourbon occurs on every page." And the letter concludes: "Be so good, my Lord, as to say to the King that I beg him to permit me to remain in the position in which this fresh instance of his kindness finds me. It is needless for me to add that, whatever happens, nothing hostile can come from me: the King need expect nothing from Victor Hugo except proofs of attachment, loyalty, and devotion."

Hugo was a good letter-writer and no mean strategist. He could hardly under the circumstances have accepted the pension, but by declining it he gained a prestige and popularity which were cheap at the price. The papers belauded his conduct, and he found himself at once on a moral pedestal—his favourite position. One curious little detail is that he speaks of the new pension offered him as one of 4000 francs, whereas it was in reality 2000—whether from unconscious tendency to inflate or by doubling the amount to double the merit of his refusal.

Marion Delorme being thus laid aside for a while, Hugo turned at once to the other subject he had had in his mind; and, going now to Spanish history instead of French, in the course of a few weeks he had written *Hernani*. Coming with all the *éclat* given it by the interdiction of its predecessor, as well as with its own high qualities, this new play was accepted "by acclamation" at the Français, and soon afterwards put into rehearsal. There was little trouble with the censorship this time, only a few trifling verbal alterations being required; but with the rehearsals began the worries which vex an author's soul.

The company of the Français were not much in love with "drama" as expounded by the author of *Cromwell*. Mlle. Mars, in particular, preferred what she had been

accustomed to, and as she had now reached the mature age of fifty she had a right to speak from experience. It was only her fear of leaving a possible triumph to some younger rival that induced her to undertake the part of Doña Sol at all. And so in rehearsing the piece she made as many difficulties as possible, and indeed—according to the oft-told story—fought a pitched battle with the author as to whether she should call Hernani "*mon lion*"—which she deemed absurd—or "*mon seigneur*"—which he considered commonplace; and she returned to this point so persistently every day that Hugo ultimately requested her to give up the part and let him find another lady to take it, with the result that Mars gave way and assumed for the future an attitude of cold and polite indifference. Another discomfort of these rehearsals was the icy temperature of the theatre during that winter of memorable severity: the actors shivering on the stage scurried through their parts in order to get back to the green-room fire. One way and another the preparation of the play was unusually protracted; and during this period some strange things happened, illustrating the length to which party feeling between the old and new schools had now reached.

It would have been impossible in any case to prevent some details about the new drama from leaking out, if only through the actors and theatrical employees, but there seems to have been an exceptional amount of prying on the part of those who were anxious to discredit *Hernani* in advance. More than once during rehearsals some hostile critic was found to be lurking in a far corner of the house. The MS. copy deposited with the censors was very difficult to get back, and one of those officials was said to have expressed publicly his poor opinion of the play. The result of these various leakages was that many garbled versions, many travesties of the lines and situations, got abroad, and *Hernani* was actually parodied at one theatre before

it had been produced. A fine advertisement, of course, well calculated to excite general curiosity. Whence it happened that long before the date fixed for the first performance, February 25, 1830, every seat had been booked. Several notable people, unable to get places otherwise, applied to Hugo—Benjamin Constant, Thiers, Mme. Récamier, &c. The space available for the public was less on this occasion than usual owing to the large number of seats reserved by the management for the author's own friends; this step being taken in consequence of Hugo's refusal to employ the professional *claque*, of whose loyalty he had some doubts. He preferred to rely on the support of young students, artists, musicians, *littérateurs*, who, formed into bands—or "tribes" as they called themselves—each under its own leader and all provided with little squares of red paper inscribed with the word *hierro* (iron), mustered at the Rue de Valois door of the Théâtre Français early in the afternoon of the eventful February 25.

It had been arranged that these volunteer *claqueurs* were to be admitted to their places any time before three o'clock, when the regular *queue* of spectators would begin to form, but through some misunderstanding the door was not opened to them until close on that hour. Meanwhile they stood waiting—a motley crowd in every kind of fantastic costume. With long beards and flowing hair, some in Spanish mantles, others in short reefer jackets, some wearing the "Robespierre" vest, others the little *toque* of Henri III.'s time—they represented the dress of every age and country except the ordinary attire of their own *bourgeois* fellow-citizens whom they despised and loved to irritate. Naturally the strange cluster attracted the notice of the passers-by. A counter-crowd soon gathered, jeers and missiles began to fly about, one or two of the "tribesmen" were hit—Balzac with a cabbage-stalk. Things might have come to a free fight, when happily the door was opened and the "Hernanists" filed into

their allotted places. Foremost of them were Gérard de Nerval and Théophile Gautier, to the latter of whom we owe the fullest account of all these events (*Histoire du Romantisme*). None made a more striking figure than he in his trousers of pale green with a black velvet stripe down the seams, his black coat with its velvet facings, and that famous scarlet satin waistcoat which has passed into history. To complete the picture of him, remember that he wore a flat broad-brimmed hat, from beneath which his hair fell in long waves down over his shoulders.

Thus by the energy of Hugo's friends, prepared to drown with applause whatever hostile demonstrations the Classicist faction might make, was victory organised. As the performance did not begin until seven, four hours had to be filled in. This was managed partly by talking and singing, partly by eating and drinking. The volunteers had not been romantic enough to forget their dinners, which they had brought with them as prudently as any common *bourgeois*. Out came the bread and the ham and the sausages ; seats served as tables, handkerchiefs as table-linen : " Molière's house " was turned into a picnic-ground. The feast was hardly finished, and the fragments of it were still in evidence when the lights were put on and the rank and fashion began to enter, sniffing an air which was heavy with the scent of garlic from the sausages.

Without reiterating details it is enough to say that whenever the success of the play was in jeopardy the " Hernanists " did their duty and saved the situation. Apart from single lines and phrases, the most critical point was the portrait scene in the third act when Don Ruy Gomez, exhibiting his ancestors (a scene which had already been " taken off " by a parody introducing a showman of bears), began to excite impatience and derision. " One—two—three—four—" people seemed to be counting on their fingers these tedious grandees. At the sixth portrait they grew very

restive; but happily the skill of the actor, Joanny, hurried the remainder of the catalogue safely through until relief came with the famous "j'en passe, et des meilleurs!" received with thunders of equivocal applause, which was soon changed, however, into genuine admiration when the old man refuses to surrender to the King the brigand chief who is his rival but yet his guest. The long monologue of Charles V. in the next act went well, the beauty of language and sentiment being again and again loudly appreciated. Finally, in the fifth act, where Doña Sol predominates, Mlle. Mars, who had been fretful and sulky all the evening at having to stand about the stage while other characters did the talking, now at length got her chance and gained a triumph, mollified by which she pronounced the play a masterpiece and graciously tendered her cheek to the author when they met in her dressing-room after the fall of the curtain.

Thus ended a memorable evening—or, rather, it did not end; for Hugo's friends escorted him home in triumph and prolonged their jubilation into the small hours. Not only in credit did the poet find himself richer but in cash also, since he took back in his pocket 6000 francs, for which sum—before the performance was over—he had sold the right to publish a first edition of *Hernani*. A mysterious stranger had sought him after the fourth act, and leading him out into the street had explained that he was a partner in a publishing firm and empowered to purchase on the spot. He named his price, which Hugo accepted, but suggested that the settlement should be left until next morning. "There's no time like the present," said the little man. "I have the money on me and we can complete the matter at once." So they stepped into a tobacconist's; the amount was paid down and the receipt given.

Among his earliest congratulations the author found next morning a note from Chateaubriand, who had been among the audience. And this first performance

of *Hernani*, though guaranteed from failure by the exceptional measures we have described, was undoubtedly a success on its merits—that is, by reason of its splendid poetry and of certain well-conceived situations. These qualities were recognised and admired alike by independent playgoers and by the majority of the newspapers, though Hugo, fond always of posing as *Athanasius contra mundum*, speaks of the whole Press except the *Journal des Débats* being hostile to him. An examination of contemporary criticism shows that this is more than an exaggeration. Whatever adverse to the play was said or implied amounted to little more than the plain truth: that its merits are lyric rather than dramatic; that it is always Hugo who is speaking through the mouths of his various characters—in short, that these characters are merely puppets set up to deliver the fine verses of their author, and that neither in word or deed do they bear any resemblance to reality and life. Transposed into ordinary prose, and called (for example) "The Tootling of the Horn," this dramatic fantasy of "Castilian Honour," with its climax of wholesale sacrifice, would travesty itself as effectively as did any of the numerous and witty parodies it called forth. Two points of interest in literary history are attached to *Hernani*. One is that its fate, unlike that of most plays, was not decided by a single or even by several performances. The excitement it aroused did not cool down after the first night, but rather grew more hot. There was always a strong opposition, to counteract which the volunteer *claqueurs* had to be in constant attendance; and though the number of seats assigned to them had to be reduced to one hundred after the third performance, they were now permitted to enter the theatre by a side door, thus avoiding a repetition of disturbance outside the house. "Get together" (Hugo writes to Paul Lacroix) "all our band of faithful friends. I count on you to help me in pulling out this last tooth from the old

Classic Pegasus." And this went on during the whole run of forty-five performances which ended on June 18,[1] when Mlle. Mars required a holiday.

To be acting thus, in a perpetual tempest, must have been most trying to the company, several of whom would gladly have seen the representations stopped; but the receipts were so good that there was no excuse for such a step. On *Hernani* nights the house was always full. The public came to see the fun as well as the play, and the fun was so varied that there was no telling how things would go on any particular night. What had been applauded one evening was hissed the next, and *vice versa ;* it was calculated, after thirty performances, that there was not a line in the play which had not at some time or other been hissed. But, besides the curiosity of this prolonged and factitious struggle, the ultimate importance of *Hernani* is that it put an end to the rigid distinction between Tragedy and Comedy hitherto maintained at the Français, and opened that theatre to the modern "Drama" and all later developments of it. A year earlier, Dumas' *Henri III.* had, it is true, been successfully presented—a better-constructed play and stronger as a "drama" than *Hernani.* But *Henri III.* had come suddenly without previous warning, the work of an almost unknown man. The classicists on that occasion had been caught napping, and had offered no organised resistance, only a belated protest. Far otherwise was it with Hugo's play, talked of for weeks and months in advance, flung down as a challenge and as such taken up. The avowed object of the old school was to prove *Hernani* impossible, and they failed. Not indeed that this drama is a very perfect illustration of the author's views as expressed in the Preface of *Cromwell :* for one thing, the "grotesque" element, so much insisted upon, is hardly present—except perhaps unintentionally. But still *Hernani* did

[1] At the Français no plays were performed night after night consecutively.

assert certain liberties at that time unusual and unorthodox. Freedom in choice of subject and arrangement of place and time; freedom of diction—the right to use ordinary speech instead of periphrasis ("Quelle heure est-il?" says the King, and the answer is "Minuit."—"Vieillard stupide!" says Hernani to Ruy Gomez, speaking plainly, though not quite so informally as the "Vieil as de pique!" which a classicist, rather hard of hearing, resented so much); freedom of metre—the "breaking" of the Alexandrine verse to render it suitable for conversation, and the carrying-on of the sentence from one line to another to avoid those awkward inversions which Racine and his followers had commonly practised.[1]

While *Hernani* was thus making Hugo famous, it had also the curious effect of causing him to be turned out of house and home. It may be imagined that all this stir of the last three or four months had troubled the usual quietude of 11 Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. Very different from sedate gatherings of literary friends were the invasions of ardent and noisy young "Hernanists," rushing in at all hours to bring news or receive instructions. To the landlady, who occupied the ground floor immediately beneath the Hugos' flat, this state of things had become an intolerable nuisance. And so one morning, gently but firmly, she gave her tenants notice to quit. "My dear lady," she said to Mme. Hugo, "you are as nice as can be and your husband seems a thoroughly good fellow, but you are not quiet enough to suit me. When I retired from business it was to live a peaceful life, and for that reason I bought this house in one of the least noisy streets. And now for the last three months there has been nothing but an endless

[1] Though the chief use of the *enjambement* is as a substitue for inversion it need hardly be said that occasional inversion for the sake of effect remains always a valuable resource. Corneille's line, *e.g.* "Tombe le ciel sur moi! pourvu que je me venge!" is an effective inversion. The line would be very feeble had he written: "Oui, je me vengerai, dût le ciel m'écraser!"

procession day and night, uproar on the staircase, stamping and shaking over my head. At one o'clock in the morning I am roused up with a start and fancy that the ceiling is about to fall down on my bed. We must, I fear, part. I am very sorry for it, and I shall regret you and your family. Do you ever get any sleep yourself, I wonder ? I do indeed pity you, poor lady : your husband's business must be a very trying one ! "

The Hugos, therefore, had to seek new quarters, which they found in the Rue Jean-Goujon—a street then in course of construction in the as yet uninhabited Champs-Elysées. Here hardly were they settled when the July Revolution broke out. The isolated position of the house rendered it difficult to get either provisions or news. In the distance they could hear the roll of drums and the crack of musketry ; between them and the central parts of the town troops barred the way. An additional complication was that Mme. Hugo was expecting every day to be confined—an event which resulted three weeks later in the birth of their last child, Adèle, to whom Sainte-Beuve was godfather. Involved in these domestic cares Victor saw little of the July days ; until, fortunately for him, the speedy collapse of any resistance to the Revolution liberated his house from its state of blockade.

But if he saw and did little, he thought a good deal during the troubled months which inaugurated Louis-Philippe's reign. Not yet an avowed politician, he meditated as a poet and a philosopher, watching the old order yielding place to the new, with an equanimity surprising in one who less than a year ago had protested his " loyalty and devotion " to the Bourbon King.

By way of explaining his attitude at this time, Hugo published a few years later [1] his *Journal des Idées d'un Révolutionnaire de 1830,* a series of reflections which profess to have been written down by him as suggested by the events of the latter part of this year. They are

[1] *Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées* (1834).

preceded by certain other ideas described as those of "a young Jacobite of 1819," and are intended to illustrate the development of his mind during those eleven years. The ideas of 1819 are mostly general observations on history, literature, and drama, which have nothing especially "Jacobitish" about them; but those of 1830 are expressed in some characteristic apothegms worth quoting. For example: "Since July what we need is the thing *republic*, the word *monarchy*"—a view of Louis-Philippe's sovereignty which was of course commonly held by those who regarded it as a bridge to eventual republicanism. Then again: "To Kings belongs the day, to peoples the morrow." Here we have had two typical Hugoesque generalities, each with its nice double antithesis. Sometimes he enters upon the more dangerous ground of particulars: "The Republic which will prevail throughout Europe a century hence is Society as the sovereign of Society; protecting itself—National Guard; judging itself—jury system; administering itself—communes; governing itself—electoral college. The four constituents of Monarchy—the Army, the Magistracy, the Administration, the Peerage—are for this Republic nothing but four troublesome excrescences which will soon die of atrophy." This sounds so fine that one almost wonders why Hugo (as some one playfully suggested) did not continue in the same strain: "This new and self-sufficient form of Society will bless itself—as priest; will settle all matters of faith—as Pope; will worship itself—as God." But he was not yet prepared to go as far as that; for, writing of the Saint-Simonians, he says: "With all their virtues, they make one great mistake. A religion cannot be founded with morality alone. Dogma and cult are also necessary, and these require mysteries, and belief in mysteries requires miracles."

Of his own feelings he writes: "My former Royalist and Catholic convictions have crumbled away bit by

bit before age and experience. What remains of them in my mind is only a religious and poetic ruin."

And again: "'Tis a poor eulogy of a man to say that his political opinions have never varied in forty years. It means that he has learnt nothing from experience and reflection: you might as well praise stagnant water. . . . Nothing in political things is absolute except the inward morality of those things, and that morality is a matter of conscience not of opinion."

To justify this unusual amount of quotation it is necessary to assume that Hugo's ideas at this crisis were—as he himself imagined—a matter of some importance. In reality there is nothing worth notice about them except his attitude towards the past, which is one of melancholy interest—the kind of æsthetic sentiment which a "ruin" would naturally evoke in the mind of a poet and an antiquarian. But this sentiment flowed in two different channels, the feebler of which was one of sympathy for the exiled Bourbons; while the stronger—and one that constantly gathered volume in the next ten years—was one of reverence and regret for the greater exile who had died in Saint Helena. The progress of Hugo's hero-worship, as indicated in his poetry, has been already noted; henceforth, as the "Napoleonic legend" grows apace, he loses no opportunity of increasing and adorning it. "Great men," he now solemnly remarks, "are the coefficients of their age." And before long he will be writing to the ex-King Joseph to assure him of "my sincere and deep admiration for your illustrious brother," and even to hint at possibilities of the future. "Whatever I can do for the heir of that great name [*i.e.* Napoleon's son, the Duc de Reichstadt, who died in 1832] I will do. He may save France; and if he would give the necessary guarantees, no one would rally to him more cordially than I."

It is evident that for the moment Hugo was thoroughly bewildered by the July Revolution, and in the same

state of uncertainty and irresolution as the majority of his countrymen. Nothing is less distinguished or original than these "Ideas of a Revolutionist of 1830." One would say that they are simply the ideas, varying from day to day, of the last newspaper he may have read or the last man in the street he may have talked to—ideas essentially commonplace and opportunist, though delivered with much pomposity of language. The one thing certain is that he had turned his back on the Legitimist principles of his youth and early manhood, and that he felt some concern to justify his conduct. Not for him the frank cynicism of Talleyrand, who, a year or so before these events, when the conversation happened to fall on dramatic trilogies, said: "Well, I should rather like to have completed my trilogy also: I made Napoleon, I made the House of Bourbon, and I shall probably end by making the House of Orleans." Not for him the quixotic chivalry of Chateaubriand, who, refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the new King, gave up pension and prospects, and retired into honourable poverty. Nor would Hugo confess simply that he went with the flowing tide, like ordinary mortals: no—he must discover some "great fact" which would contribute a virtuous reason for his change of front. He soon found what he wanted. If he has changed, it is—says he—as one who has been guided by conscience in the quest of truth, as one to whom the *inward morality* of political things is all that matters.

With such an explanation it would be indecorous to quarrel; we can only admire an exalted and impregnable attitude which will equally serve for this and for all future occasions. And so the man who had been the laureate of the Bourbons now tuned his lyre to celebrate the heroes of July; and on August 19 his "Ode to Young France" appeared in the *Globe*,[1] preceded by an editorial comment, of which Sainte-Beuve afterwards

[1] Afterwards published in the *Chants du Crépuscule*, under the title *Dicté après Juillet 1830.*

owned himself author, welcoming the poet's conversion to the cause of progress, and congratulating him—perhaps not without some irony—on his readiness to "accept without flinching the changed political doctrines of his country." Far indeed from flinching, Hugo soon discovered that he ought to pride himself on his consistency, for, argued he, "I realised that all progress hangs together, and that, as I had been a progressive in literature, it would ill become me to be a reactionary in politics." In the same strain he writes (September 7), to Lamartine: "*Our* revolution, I mean the literary one, will march side by side with its sister, the political: revolutions, like wolves, do not devour each other." To Saint-Valry he writes jocosely about "your monarchical little town of Montfort-l'Amaury where the good folk are still enjoying their Royalist honeymoon of 1815. Imagine what they would think of me, and how I should have compromised your mother had I accepted her kind offer of hospitality. As it is, I have compromised only the inn where I stayed, which will perhaps lose its sign of the *fleur-de-lis* for having afforded me a lodging."

On the whole, it will be seen that Hugo said good-bye to the past, if not with indecent alacrity, at any rate without much regret or compunction. Fortunately, the "inward morality" system did not require him to resign the pension he had gained by literary services to the late dynasty.

CHAPTER VII

1830–1833

How *Notre Dame de Paris* was written : Its first reception and gradual recognition : *Marion Delorme* : Reasons for the delay in its production : Hugo's wish for a theatre of his own : *Les Feuilles d'Automne* : Hugo's *Ame de cristal* : The Cholera : First lawsuit : The Hugos move to the Place Royale : Performance and prohibition of *Le Roi s'amuse* : Action against the Comédie Française : Success of *Lucrèce Borgia* : *Marie Tudor* : Hugo's quarrel with Harel and with Dumas

THE Revolution had occurred inopportunely for Hugo's literary work. As far back as 1828 he had planned and had sold to the publisher, Gosselin, a romance which should depict Paris of the Middle Age, and should have for its centre the venerable cathedral of Notre Dame—a book, as he described it himself, "without any historical pretensions except to portray incidentally the condition of manners in the fifteenth century, but pre-eminently and above all else a book of imagination and fancy." This work, so congenial to the author's taste and talent, was to have been completed by April 1829; but *Les Orientales, Marion Delorme, Hernani* had taken up all his time, with the result that by the middle of 1830 not a line of *Notre Dame* had been written. The publisher grew angry and threatened legal proceedings; he was, however, induced to make a fresh agreement, postponing the date for delivery of the MS. to December 1, 1830. But hardly had the work begun when the July disturbances broke out; a book of notes, the result of studies made for the purpose, conveyed with other valuables to the Fouchers' house for greater safety, was lost. This misfortune, as well as the difficulty

of sitting down amid so much political excitement, compelled the author to seek a further extension of time, and finally February 1, 1831, was fixed as the limit, beyond which each week's delay would mean a fine of a thousand francs. Thus, with five and a half months before him, Hugo set himself in grim earnest to write *Notre Dame de Paris*. Purchasing a large bottle of ink and a thick woollen jersey, he locked away all his clothes to avoid any temptation of going out, and sat down to his writing-table, which he never left except to eat or sleep.

At first it was weary work, this hermit-like seclusion and the oppressive sense of a struggle against time. But soon the author grew into his creation and lived in his characters, becoming insensible to fatigue or cold and working eagerly on with windows wide open to the wintry air. On January 14 the last line was written, the last drop of ink used up,[1] and Hugo felt as sorry to part with his book as he had been reluctant to begin it. The novel was published on March 17 (1831), in two octavo volumes, with vignettes engraved from drawings by Tony Johannot, at the price of 15 francs. Again the author complains that the majority of notices were hostile, but the fact seems to be that the papers being fully occupied with politics, devoted very little space to books. Thus it happened that, by one of those accidental misfortunes to which all authors are liable, *Notre Dame* received nothing like the attention it deserved—nothing, in short, to indicate the masterpiece which the judgment of time has pronounced it to be. The one adequate appreciation it met with at the moment was in Lamennais' journal, *L'Avenir*, and consisted of two articles signed "Ch. de M." The initials were those of Montalembert, then a young man of twenty-one; and from

[1] Hugo says that this coincidence tempted him for a moment to change the name of his book to *Ce qu'il y a dans une bouteille d'encre*. Some years later he mentioned this to Alphonse Karr, who was so pleased with the title that he asked Hugo if he might use it for one of his own books, and did so.

this time, until political differences separated them, there was warm friendship between the poet and the orator.

The same causes which operated against the proper recognition of *Notre Dame* in the papers prevented its first sales from being very brisk. Business was bad all round, money was scarce, and fifteen francs was a good deal to pay for such a luxury as a novel. And so the seven so-called editions,[1] which were printed between March 1831 and October 1832, appear on investigation to represent a sale of only 3100 copies in a year and a half. Yet the book made its way steadily and found increasing favour, not only in France but throughout Europe and America, where it did more to spread Hugo's name than any of his previous works. Long since *Notre Dame* has taken its place as a classic—one of the books that every one has to read once and most people gladly read again. It is needless, therefore, to repeat what has been said so often before; but, after all is said, it remains as the great triumph of the author to have made live before our eyes and in our memories, as though real and probable, a world which we know all the time to be unreal and outside of experience—the world of his own vision—the world peopled by La Esmeralda, Quasimodo, Claude Frollo, Pierre Gringoire, Jacques Coppemole, Captain Phœbus, Clopin Trouillefer, and the rest. To do this required the dim enchantment of a remote age conjured up by the imagination of the poet and the art of the romancer.

Informed by fancy, by learning, by love of the past, this prose poem is pervaded throughout by the "sense of tears"—the futility of all human striving against a fate as inexorable as that conceived by ancient tragedy.

[1] From the admirable bibliography appended to Sir Frank T. Marzial's *Victor Hugo* (in the "Great Writers" series), as well as from French authorities, it seems that the edition published in October 1832 and professing to be the *eighth* edition ought really to be called the *second*. It is the first which contains the three additional chapters.

"Il tomba en poussière"—those unforgettable last words summarise the spirit of the whole, too pessimistic it will seem to some who prefer the more manly cheerfulness of *Quentin Durward*, where the lights are brighter and the shadows less deep. That, however, is a point of taste which can hardly affect our instinctive admiration of Hugo's masterpiece. Others there are who have detected in the work inaccuracies of historical and architectural detail; others, again, rigid Catholics, who have condemned it as an "impious book," because pagan ideas are introduced into the temple of Christianity and because the priesthood is discredited in the evil person of Archdeacon Frollo. Against all such pedantic or sectarian criticism, so petty in proportion to its object, *Notre Dame* has stood secure and unmoved, even as the great cathedral itself when the mob raged furiously around its walls.

For some time Hugo contemplated following up his great romance with two others dealing with the same period; but the idea was never carried out, and his next essay in fiction was not to be until he published *Les Misérables* thirty years later. For the moment his thoughts turned to the drama which he had ready for production. The July Revolution, after the manner of revolutions, had been followed by the temporary abolition of the censorship, and the Français was anxious to produce *Marion Delorme*. It was obvious, as Mlle. Mars and others pointed out, that a play which every one knew to have been personally prohibited by Charles X. was bound in this hour of reaction to make a great hit. Hugo, however, declined all proposals for immediate production, chiefly because—as he tells us in several places—he was unwilling to give occasion for demonstrations against the exiled King, and deemed it "unworthy to make money out of the misfortunes of a royal house."

Without detracting in any way from the merits of a sentiment which, after all, was—under the cir-

cumstances—only natural and decent, one may observe, as an instance of happy agreement between the right and the expedient, that a dramatist had at this particular time little inducement to risk a new play and little chance of making money out of "the misfortunes of a royal house" or any other subject. For all the Paris theatres, the Français especially, did very badly during the latter half of 1830, and some were on the point of closing their doors. In the course of the next year it happened, as Hugo says, that the feeling against Charles X. had largely died down; it also happened that one theatre in particular, the Porte-Saint-Martin, was doing excellent business. And so it was to this theatre, not to the Français, that the author of *Marion Delorme*, guided by a sound commercial instinct, gave his drama. Produced there on August 11, with Mme. Dorval as Marion and Bocage as Didier, it gained a distinct success, and there are many good judges who consider *Marion Delorme* as on the whole the best of Hugo's plays. Nowhere else has the poet realised so well his own principle of mingling the grave and the gay as here, where, along with the tragic interest, there are several scenes and at least one character—that of Saverny—of pure and delightful comedy. In all his dramatic work Hugo could turn on the wit when required, for contrast's sake; the merit of *Marion Delorme* is that the wit does not seem turned on, but flows naturally, fresh and unforced.

Not that this drama, however high we may rate it, made anything like the stir of *Hernani*. The ardour alike of supporters and opponents had cooled down, the Romantic youth were now divided into two factions—the adherents of Dumas (whose sensational *Antony* had preceded *Marion Delorme*) and those who still swore by Hugo alone. Hence a slight unpleasantness between these two; or rather—for the good-hearted Dumas was all admiration and reverence for "the greatest poet of France and of the world"—a cause of irritation to one

whose self-esteem at this stage could tolerate no rivalry. The stimulus of this feeling—the resolve to show himself "Victor in drama"—may perhaps account for the vigour with which Hugo now threw himself into play-writing. For a time he even contemplated a scheme for taking over the direction of the Comédie Française, with an undertaking to produce at least once a week some play from the *répertoire* of Racine and Voltaire, and with no other State subvention than a guaranteed *minimum* receipt of 2000 francs for each such performance of a Classic play; the other evenings were apparently to be devoted to the exploitation of Romantic drama at the author's own risks and charges. This wild proposal, however, came to nothing, much to the relief of the poet's more sedate friends, who were horrified at the idea of his plunging into theatrical speculation.

The next few years of Hugo's life are mainly occupied with dramatic authorship—a story of quarrels and lawsuits, success, failure, and ultimate weariness. But 1831, before we leave it, deserves to be noted with a white mark: after *Notre Dame de Paris*, after *Marion Delorme*, came the *Feuilles d'Automne*, and this triple crown will always be regarded by many as marking the author's highest point of literary achievement. It was towards the end of the year, a time when France was divided against itself, when—with Legitimist movements in La Vendée and Republican discontent in Paris—the Government of Louis-Philippe seemed staggering to its fall, and no man knew what the morrow might bring forth; it was amid all this animosity and agitation that the poet's new volume of verse appeared, striking a serene and peaceful note above the jarring discord of the time. "Art," say Hugo in his Preface, "is independent of political changes and passions; and these pages—just dead leaves, as all autumn leaves must be—are to be considered the echo of such thoughts, often beyond words, as are awakened within us at the

sight of a suffering creature, a faded flower, a falling star, a setting sun, a roofless church, a grass-grown street."

In fact, these poems—several of which (*Prière pour tous, A un Voyageur*, &c.) are included in all Hugo anthologies—are devoid of political reference, if we except the general pleading for oppressed countries which forms the subject of the last. Otherwise, *Les Feuilles d'Automne* are verses of family life and affection, tinged —as *Notre Dame* had been—with a melancholy which was very fashionable at the time.

But this tone of detachment from his surroundings need not be taken to prove that Hugo had ceased to take interest in politics, for the majority of the pieces in the *Feuilles d'Automne* had been written previously to the July Revolution. In truth, he had not yet recovered from the agitation of that event ; his opinions were still unfixed, and his adherence to the House of Orleans could only be lukewarm until that dynasty should seem decently secure. In one of his poems he speaks of his "âme de cristal"—"a mirror which reflects every passing breath." Nothing could be truer. At this time (1832) he was divided between Republican and Napoleonic leanings, or rather—like many others—he fused the two, not deeming it inconsistent to praise the man of war and blood while yet cherishing ideas of liberty and fraternity. And so—besides the friendly relations with Joseph Bonaparte already referred to—we find him in the same Napoleonic strain, writing pieces like the second *Ode à la Colonne* and the *Ode à Napoléon II*. On another question, too, the "crystal soul" showed its sensitiveness to the breath of popular opinion. Hugo's opposition to capital punishment was again expressed in the Preface to a new edition of *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, a Preface quite truculent in its democratic tone; yet he took by no means the prominent part we should have expected—the part Lamartine did take—in

resisting the vulgar outcry for vengeance upon the Polignac Ministry. For the common criminal, he was, it seems, all sympathy and sentiment ; but for unfortunate politicians it was a different matter—especially if they were unpopular with the mob.

The general uneasiness of public affairs was just now aggravated by the scourge of pestilence. The cholera, after a steady and threatening advance, reached Paris in the spring, and increased through the summer and autumn. While it was at its height, one member of Hugo's family, his boy Charles, was attacked by all the usual symptoms—burning thirst, vomiting, icy coldness of the skin. There was no doubt what this meant : happily the child, after hanging for three days between life and death, recovered, thanks to medical care and parental devotion.

This anxiety had fallen upon Hugo at a time when he was immersed in the cares of dramatic authorship. Over the mass of facts supplied by this part of his career we must be content to pass lightly. Already the publication of *Marion Delorme* had involved him in his first lawsuit. This was an action brought against him by the publisher Gosselin for breach of contract, the plaintiff's contention being that after the publication of *Notre Dame* the defendant had agreed to give him the first refusal—on equal terms—of any future work, and that in this case the alleged higher bid of another firm was not a *bona fide* offer but merely a collusive arrangement between Hugo and the publisher Renduel, to whom he had now transferred his custom. The Tribunal de Commerce declared itself incompetent to deal with the matter, and the case seems to have gone no further, though its details—so far as we have them—leave a rather unpleasant impression of "sharp practice" on the part of the poet. Of wider interest, however, is Hugo's dramatic work in 1832—the two plays which he wrote in quick succession, *Le Roi s'amuse* and *Lucrèce Borgia*. The former of these was taken

by the Théâtre Français, and its rehearsals began as soon as the Hugos had returned from their usual autumn visit to the Bertin family at Bièvre. If the author did not attend the preparations of his drama as carefully as was usual with him, the reason is to be found partly in a troublesome weakness of the eyes from which he was now suffering, and still more in the worries of yet another change of house—" a chaos " (he writes) " in which for the last week I have been occupied all day in hammering and nailing things up." They were moving now to 6 Place Royale, the house where—as tradition said—Marion Delorme had lived. Here they were close to Nodier at the Arsenal, and about this time the faithful Gautier came to reside at the opposite corner of the same Place. Hugo's suite was on the second floor, and was furnished in a style indicative of his growing prosperity. The *salon* in particular was a regular gallery of pictures, given by Boulanger, Delacroix, and other leading painters, who were proud to decorate the " Master's " rooms. On the left of the mantelpiece was a dais—to the malicious an opportunity of declaring that here Hugo sat as on a throne and received the homage of kneeling admirers.

Hardly was the moving-in completed when *Le Roi s'amuse* was announced for November 22. It was heralded—as had now become usual—by some carefully prepared specimens of the puff preliminary ; notably in the *Journal des Débats,* where Hugo's influence was at this time supreme (as had recently been shown by the dismissal of one of the staff of that paper, who, in the course of an appreciative article on the *Feuilles d'Automne,* had ventured on a few critical reservations, and by the importation of a provincial admirer, Granier de Cassagnac, who served henceforth as the poet's most devoted henchman). The production of *Le Roi s'amuse*—which had already been the subject of some anxious inquiries by the Minister of Public Works—recalled the stormy scenes of *Hernani.* Again " the young men,"

as Hugo calls them, were to the fore; again, during the last three acts, there was a babel of applause and hisses. In spite of the fine acting of Ligier as Triboulet, the verdict of independent opinion was clearly adverse to a drama the harrowing effect of which was produced by unnatural means—by that overwrought contrast of meanness and deformity relieved by one redeeming virtue: in Quasimodo, the bellringer in *Notre Dame*, as in Triboulet the jester in *Le Roi s'amuse*. Again, both in the novel and in the drama, Fatality, one of Hugo's fixed ideas, broods over the whole; with Blanche as with Esmeralda the parent's love contributes unwittingly to the destruction of the child. When the curtain fell, the formal pronouncement of the author's name was almost inaudible amid the tumult. That night there was no triumphal procession home: alone, in a downpour of rain, Hugo gloomily walked back to the Place Royale, to meditate on his first decisive rebuff.

It was not, however, the hostility of the audience which cut short the career of *Le Roi s'amuse*, but the action of the Government. The fact that three days previously (not, as Hugo says, on the very day of the performance) an attempt had been made on the life of Louis-Philippe, and that a King of France was held up to scorn as a frequenter of low taverns and a debaucher of young girls, justified M. d'Argont in promptly prohibiting the play as "an outrage on public morals" and a libellous perversion of history. Never again was *Le Roi s'amuse*, though made familiar in Europe by Verdi's *Rigoletto*, seen on the French stage until 1882. At that time, when Hugo had already entered on his apotheosis, the experiment was made. Every one came prepared to admire and applaud; every one went away simply bored: so much difference had fifty years made in people's ideas of the line between audacity and absurdity.

But, to return to 1832, Hugo was probably not so

surprised as he professed to be at what he calls the "arbitrary and incredible" interdiction of his play; at any rate, he was quick to draw from it all the advantages of publicity. Not only was *Le Roi s'amuse* published with loud advertisement as the "drama prohibited by the Ministry," but an action-at-law was brought, in form against the Comédie Française for breach of contract, in reality against the Government. The case was heard before the Tribunal de Commerce on December 19, and was of course decided against the author; but it gave Hugo the opportunity of appearing for the first time as an orator. After the speech of his advocate, Odilon Barrot, he rose himself and delivered an elaborate oration, which he had learnt by heart, and copies of which had been sent beforehand to the papers. It was a display of rhetoric received with such applause from the numerous friends who were present as to call forth the usual presidential warning that "this court is not a theatre"—a sentiment which Victor, proud of himself and his audience, could not in the least have shared. Many compliments followed this effort, among them one from Montalembert, who said: "Well, if they close the theatre against you, you will always be able to fall back on the tribune." But the Ministerial journals, indignant at the vehemence of Hugo's attack on M. d'Argont, kept calling attention to the fact that he was still drawing the Civil List Pension granted him in 1823: their comments decided the poet to resign this sum of 2000 francs a year, which he did in a letter of December 23 addressed to the Minister.

Hugo—as said before—had another play ready to take the place of the one which had been banned. Naturally it was not the Théâtre Français that he dealt with this time, but the Porte-Saint-Martin, the manager of which, Harel, was attracted by the prospect of providing a showy part for Mlle. George; and it was doubtless for the sake of the title-part as much as for any other reason that he suggested naming the drama

Lucrèce Borgia instead of *Le Souper à Ferrara* as Hugo had originally called it. Harel's advice was also taken in the introduction of incidental music. Meyerbeer and Berlioz offered their services for this, but the manager's common sense said: "None of your great composers for me; their music will be listened to and will distract attention from the drama; let Piccini do what is wanted." Piccini was the conductor of the Porte-Saint-Martin orchestra, and he soon invented a modest but sufficient accompaniment. Into all these preparations Hugo entered eagerly, at one time himself designing the setting of the supper scene, at another indicating to the conductor by beating his hand on the table—for he had no note of music in his voice—the kind of refrain which would be suitable to the words. Besides Mlle. George the cast included Frédéric Lemaître in the part of Gennaro, and both these public favourites — unlike Mlle. Mars — showed themselves amenable to the author's views in the interpretation of their character.

All went well at rehearsals, and the play was produced on February 2, 1833—a memorable occasion for many reasons. In the first place the poet had dropped into prose and written a melodrama pure and simple—an experiment which many of his friends viewed with alarm, considering that poetic form was his strongest point. Their fears, however, were hardly justified; for though the critical reader will doubtless always prefer Hugo's verse dramas to his prose, it is certain that in stage qualities the author is at his best in *Lucrèce Borgia*, with its simple action, unencumbered by any superfluous situation, moving straight on to its sinister *dénouement*. There were others who lamented that the poet of the *Feuilles d'Automne* should have descended to such a feast of horrors as this "Supper at Ferrara"; but they were perhaps a minority, for the Parisian public just then were quite in the vein of gruesome melodrama, as was

proved by the success, at the same theatre only a few months before, of the famous *Tour de Nesle*. Nothing could have annoyed Hugo more than to suggest that in *Lucrèce Borgia* he had piled up the agony in an attempt to go one better than Dumas, yet it was an obvious remark to make if any one was irreverent enough to ignore the higher moral purpose of the poet who claims to have "a charge of souls," who feels that "he is responsible for what he teaches his audience," and that "the spectators should carry away with them from the theatre some stern and deep moral truth."

From these lofty sentiments—which appear in the introduction—it is plain that we are not to regard the play as a vulgar melodrama. What, then, is the "deep moral truth" to be impressed upon us? The same old thesis which had already served as the foundation of *Marion Delorme* and of *Le Roi s'amuse* now illustrated in a type of "the most complete and repulsive moral deformity" mingled with "one pure feeling, the purest that a woman can have, the feeling of motherhood; in short, motherhood sanctifying moral deformity—that is the essence of *Lucrèce Borgia*." Apart from the question of fidelity to nature and life, one may well wonder whether any very valuable moral truth emerges from this public display of the poisoned cup and the dagger, rape, incest, and all hideous criminality. The example of Greek drama, or of Racine's *Phèdre*, might be quoted to justify horrors as a means of "pity and fear"; but, as has been admirably pointed out, the cardinal lesson of ancient tragedy was that a single bad passion might be sufficient to ruin a soul, whereas the lesson of dramas like *Lucrèce Borgia* seems to be that a single good quality may excuse any number of vices—a more comfortable doctrine, certainly, but hardly more edifying. And there remains the minor consideration of historical fact—minor, at any rate, for the writer himself and for his boulevard audiences, though calculated to rouse even an elementary sense of justice in protest

against the exaggeration of a monstrous legend. Even at the time when Hugo wrote, the sister of Cæsar Borgia was known to have been grossly maligned by tradition, while it is needless to say that no modern historian accepts a tithe of the crimes attributed to her. However, what did that matter ? The play was the thing, and the success of the play was a handsome compensation for the fate of *Le Roi s'amuse.* It seemed that Victor, with his well-composed and gorgeously mounted melodrama, had conquered the stage—even if he had somewhat stooped to conquer. But the dramatic author has no final security ; he is always on a switchback of ups and downs, as the event was soon to show.

Encouraged by the popularity of *Lucrèce Borgia,* Hugo made another experiment in the same direction. By his own account he had no particular wish to give his new play to the Porte-Saint-Martin, but apparently he had already made a conditional promise which the manager, delighted with the receipts of *Lucrèce Borgia* and its advertisement by numerous parodies, insisted on regarding as an absolute undertaking. There were some sharp disputes about this, in the course of which Harel—a serio-comic person—went so far as to challenge Hugo to a duel for doubting his word. However, he thought better of it and apologised, remarking, with obvious truth, that to kill an author would be a futile way of getting a play out of him. So the matter was amicably settled, and *Marie Tudor* was written for the Porte-Saint-Martin, where it was produced on November 6, 1833. Like its predecessor it was in prose ; like all Hugo's dramas, and more than most of them, it depended greatly on mechanical effects which would appeal to the nerves of the spectators rather than to their minds—the hall hung with black relieved only by a large white cross, the dim funereal lights, the altar with its sombre drapery, the executioner in red and black, with his great sword—and so on. In *Lucrèce Borgia* the author had at any rate the excuse of following tradition

in the case of a character traditional almost more than historical; in *Marie Tudor* he deliberately took and libelled a well-known personage, whose ill-starred life demands more sympathy than condemnation. That the unfortunate daughter of Henry VIII. was soured by bigotry and unhappiness every one knows; that she was—as represented here— a shameless and dissolute woman, not even her enemies have pretended. Besides this outrage on truth and good taste—which, indeed, would have had no effect on the play's chances of success—*Marie Tudor* had not even the merit of originality of subject, since—as critics and spectators could not fail to notice—it followed closely, both in characters and in situations, the lines of Dumas' *Christine*. Whether for this reason, or simply because it seemed tedious and exaggerated, the reception of the drama was hostile enough to indicate that its career would be short. Such was evidently the opinion of Harel, who, according to Hugo, was anxious to get rid of *Marie Tudor* as quickly as possible in order to replace it by Dumas' *Angèle*, in which both he and Mlle. George had much greater faith. And so, on the day before the first performance, he insisted strongly on the necessity of certain changes in the cast, which the author would not hear of. Hence the following dialogue between poet and manager.

HAREL: Very well, your play will be a failure.

HUGO: Does that mean that you will make it a failure?

HAREL: You can take it to mean what you like.

HUGO: Very good, M. Harel, ruin my play, and I will ruin your theatre.

Truly a dignified scene! But we find it difficult to believe that Harel, as Hugo intimates, deliberately set himself to wreck *Marie Tudor*—on the production of which he had spent money lavishly—by paying his *claque* to hiss it; that sounds like a theory invented by the author to account for a failure which irritated and

disappointed him. Still, after this unpleasantness, we can understand Victor's remark that "relations were no longer possible between M. Hugo and the Porte-Saint-Martin."

More serious than the breach with Harel was the ill-feeling which this affair brought to a head between Hugo and Dumas. The former had long secretly resented the greater popularity and success of the other as a dramatist, and the friends of each—it is always "friends" who do the mischief in these cases—had by invidious comparisons between the one and the other created a rivalry very embarrassing to both. At the moment there was no doubt that people would talk about the similarity of *Marie Tudor* and *Christine*, while it was particularly galling to Hugo to know that the manager of the Porte-Saint-Martin was thirsting to produce yet another of his rival's plays. He determined, therefore, to—shall we say ?—put Dumas in his proper place; and that is why on November 1, just before the first performance of *Marie Tudor*, there appeared in the *Journal des Débats* a prominent article calling attention to the numerous and flagrant plagiarisms of Alexandre Dumas and extolling the genius of Victor Hugo. The article was signed "G," and some people supposed that Hugo himself had written it; others correctly divined in this initial the Granier de Cassagnac who—as mentioned before—owed his position on the *Débats* to Hugo's recommendation, and they concluded that the article was "inspired." Certain it was, considering Hugo's friendship with Bertin and his omnipotence on Bertin's paper, that nothing concerning him could have appeared there without his approval. "It is a pretty scandal," wrote Sainte-Beuve, "and means that Hugo and Dumas are estranged for ever." The injured party, at any rate, did his best to put things right. Immediately on reading the article he wrote to Hugo a rather touching letter (beginning "My dear Victor," and ending, "Yours always and in spite of all") in which he

expressed his surprise and sorrow at such treatment by a friend.

Hugo's reply was evasive with some general remarks about "unworthy suspicions" and so forth, and postponed an explanation until they should meet. Apparently no satisfactory interview took place, since a coolness resulted which lasted for several years; and if Sainte-Beuve's prediction was not exactly verified, that was due entirely to Dumas' forgiving and forgetting nature. At the moment the Conservatives of Literature looked on and laughed at this split between the chiefs of the young school—between "Cæsar and Pompey," as one paper said; and a great deal of capital was made out of the exposure of Dumas' literary annexations. But general sympathy—as between the two men—was wholly on his side; it was felt that he had been the victim of a dirty trick, or rather, the intended victim, for the blow had recoiled on its originator, who suffered the more harm of the two. Thirty years later, in his autobiography, Hugo returned to the subject, and tried to make out that the insertion of the article was a mistake due to a sub-editor in the absence of his chief. But the explanation explains nothing, and is at variance with the statements both of Cassagnac and of Bertin, so that one is forced to conclude that common opinion at the time of the episode was correct. It is, unfortunately, not the only instance of pettiness which the career of the great poet affords.

CHAPTER VIII

1833–1837

Hugo and Sainte-Beuve : First indications of the latter's feelings for Mme. Hugo : Strained relations : Appearance of "Juliette Drouet" : Hugo's infatuation for her : *Les Chants du Crépuscule* : Final rupture with Sainte-Beuve : The alleged love of Mme. Hugo and Sainte-Beuve : The *Livre d'Amour* and its history : Later relations between the Hugos and Sainte-Beuve : Who was to blame ? : Supremacy of Hugo

OVER and above professional troubles, Hugo's life at this time was agitated by other causes likely enough to account for that tone of pessimism which some of his biographers have noted and wondered at. The chief of these is one of so personal and delicate a nature that, had it not been already exposed to the full light of day, one would shrink from being the first to introduce it. But the age of reticence is past, and has been succeeded by an age of publicity, brutally heroic in its search for "truth."

The intimacy of Hugo and Sainte-Beuve and the close literary alliance between the two have often been referred to. As time went on, it was noticed that more reserve appeared in the critic's appreciations of the poet, and it was concluded that Sainte-Beuve—the first flush of his romantic ardour having gone—was gradually growing away from a school to the extravagances of which his critical sense must always have been alive. This was true enough, so far as it went; but the real and ultimate cause of the alienation was for long a secret whispered only by a few behind the scenes. Divulged—as will presently appear—by the spite or vanity of one of the principal parties, it became

for a while the subject of common gossip within a limited area. Finally, when all concerned in it had passed away, the addition of such evidence as is supplied by the letters of Victor Hugo and that of Sainte-Beuve has led to a more or less hypothetical reconstruction of the story—whether due to the curiosity of scandal or to the desire of vindicating a woman's good name.[1]

In speaking of the friendship between Sainte-Beuve and Hugo we should have said "the Hugos," for it was a family affair, including not only Monsieur but Madame and the babies. At first nothing could have been more frank, cordial, delightful. Then, unhappily, at some date not precisely ascertainable, Sainte-Beuve found that his feelings for Mme. Hugo were no longer merely those of a friend. Victor's wife was—by the say of all and as her portraits show—a very beautiful woman in the dark style of beauty more generally admired in those days than it is now. Though without the vivacity and *esprit* of so many French women, she was intellectual, refined, and essentially kind-hearted. The famous critic, as every one knows, had not been favoured by Nature with outward gifts. ("He is not plain, he is hideous," Mme. Hugo herself is reported to have said of him.) But he was aware, no doubt, that ugliness has a fascination of its own, and is no bar to success in love. Not, of course, that Sainte-Beuve set himself deliberately to win over his friend's wife: he simply fell in love—as people do—gradually, unconsciously. And the first indication of this feeling seems to be in his letters written at the time when preparations for *Hernani* were going on, and when the Hugos' house was crowded day and night with persons connected with the production. The presence of all these strangers—as may be seen from his fretful tone—was an annoyance because it prevented him from enjoying Mme.

[1] The two chief works on the subject are *Le Livre d'Amour de Sainte-Beuve*, by G. Michaut (1905), and *Le Roman de Sainte-Beuve*, by Gustave Simon (1906).

Hugo's society. To give him his due, he acted honourably at this stage. He told his friend the state of the case and said that under the circumstances he had better keep away from the house. But Victor, with more grandeur than wisdom, absolutely refused to accept this confession of love. He pooh-poohed the whole affair. "You are mistaken, my dear fellow; you are dreaming; what you say is impossible. Please on no account make any change in your habits; continue to come here every day as before, and come twice a day instead of once."

Naturally Sainte-Beuve continued to come. Soon afterwards the departure of the Hugos from the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, where they had been almost next door to him, left him desolate: he went off to Rouen for a while to stay with Ulric Guttinguer—a mutual friend—to whom he confided the trouble of his heart. From here he wrote affectionately but sadly to Victor, and received a kind and soothing reply. When little Adèle Hugo was born (July 25, 1830) Sainte-Beuve was invited to be godfather, and he held the child at the font seven weeks later. Then his visits became rare and his letters ceased: once more he explained his reasons—the moth striving to keep away from the flame—and once more Hugo pressed him to return.

So far the affair has been creditable to both parties in a difficult case. So little ill-feeling was there that the husband even showed his wife Sainte-Beuve's letters to him, reading and discussing them amicably with her. But now a change comes, caused (they say) by Mme. Hugo being found one day in tears over a letter of Sainte-Beuve's. The husband's fatuous self-confidence is succeeded by uneasiness. Yet Cæsar is too proud to be frank with his wife, and he suffers all the tortures of jealousy until—agreeably with the romantic theory of freedom in love—he seems to have said something to Sainte-Beuve about leaving his wife to

choose between them. An illusory offer, of course, which only offends Sainte-Beuve, who in future keeps at a distance and indicates his coolness by declining to write a notice of *Notre Dame* for the *Globe*. There was as yet, however, no definite breach, and in a few weeks' time more or less friendly relations were resumed.

But it was no longer the same thing. Hugo, indeed—to judge from the tone of his letters—desired sincerely to preserve or restore the old relations. ("There are," he writes, "only two or three realities in life, and friendship is one of them.") But Sainte-Beuve, all loyalty and friendship now lost, seems to have made it his object deliberately to ingratiate himself with Mme. Hugo. Hitherto his conduct has been decent; henceforth it becomes reptilian. As to Victor, he grew harsh and reproachful towards his wife, and there were many harrowing scenes. In vain did she beg him always to be present when their friend called: his pride even more than his affection was deeply wounded. For a moment a happy solution of the difficulty seemed possible when Sainte-Beuve accepted the Chair of Literature at the University of Liége; but when Hugo wrote congratulating him on the appointment and adding—foolishly or maliciously—that his wife was also delighted to hear of it, the lover was so nettled that he gave up Liége and resolved to stay in Paris. Then at last Hugo spoke out plainly and told Sainte-Beuve that for the present at any rate they had better not see each other. If their relations thenceforward were not openly hostile, it was doubtless because Sainte-Beuve's object was to appease Victor's suspicions and so get back within sight of Madame. To this sinister design we may attribute a very eulogistic notice of Hugo's work in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, as well as an ostensibly warm appreciation of *Les Feuilles d'Automne*. To this period also belong, no doubt, many surreptitious attempts of the lover to see the beloved; and a touch of comedy—nay, of farce—comes in to

brighten the sordid scene when we read how Sainte-Beuve used to pay visits to the flat in the Rue Jean-Goujon disguised as an old aunt of Mme. Hugo. One day, it is said, the *concierge,* whose curiosity was perhaps aroused, followed the "aunt" up the stairs; and Sainte-Beuve, hastening to get to the top, incautiously pulled up the encumbering skirts so high as to show the trousers beneath, thus revealing to the astonished *concierge* that this aunt (like "Charley's") was indeed "no ordinary woman."

And here we must interrupt for a moment the history of Hugo and Sainte-Beuve in order to range alongside of it another history so much its complement that the one cannot be understood without the other. Every one knows of the "romance" of Victor Hugo and "Juliette Drouet"; but its origin has not generally been regarded—as it ought to be—in connection with the domestic events we have just been describing. It was in 1833, during the rehearsals of *Lucrèce Borgia,* that the poet first made acquaintance with a lady whose future was destined to be inseparably linked with his. At this time Julienne-Joséphine Gauvain—as her real name was—was twenty-seven years of age, and had had a somewhat adventurous career. Born of humble parents at Fougères in Brittany, she had been educated in a convent school where she had shown tastes far from conventual. At the age of nineteen she had become the model and the mistress of the sculptor Pradier, who used her shapely figure and classic profile for the Strasburg statue in the Place de la Concorde. Turning then to the stage, after some preliminary experience in Brussels, she obtained (in 1830) an engagement at the Porte-Saint-Martin, where, besides playing several minor characters, she created (in 1832) the part of "Térésa" in Dumas' drama of that name. Opinions were divided about her merits as an actress, but there were no two opinions about her beauty and her grace. In *Lucrèce Borgia*—

with Mlle. George of course in the leading *rôle*—there was nothing for Juliette except the very slight part of the Princess Negroni, so insignificant that it seemed doubtful whether she would care to take it. She settled the question, however, by calling on Hugo and begging to be allowed to play it : "Any share, however small, in interpreting the creations of the great poet would be an honour to her," &c.

That was the beginning, and events moved rapidly. A fortnight after the production of *Lucrèce Borgia* Hugo became her lover, and duly commemorated the fact (February 17, 1833) by a passionate letter in the *Livre de l'Anniversaire*—a sentimental invention of the lady who wished that every year, on the anniversary of the day she had first given herself to him, her lover should write a page in that book. This duty Hugo performed for fifty years. At first there was a difficulty caused by the fact that Juliette, when she met her Romeo, was living under the protection of a Russian—or Polish—millionaire. Hugo, of course, would not tolerate any partition treaty, and before long his mistress—in proof of the sincerity of her passion—broke with the other man, sold her furniture and belongings, and contented herself with the very moderate assistance which her new lover was able or willing to supply. Henceforth she becomes a recognised institution in the poet's life, "his ever-present Beatrice," "the constant companion of his travels," "the comfort and inspiration of his exile." As she will recur frequently in these pages, there is no need to say more of her here; and we may resume again the triangular affair of Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, and Mme. Hugo, with which the intervention of Juliette Drouet must be held to have had some relation either of cause or effect.

It is to be noted that the poet when he succumbed to this new fascination had already been worried for some time by his knowledge of the feelings of

Sainte-Beuve for his wife. Under such conditions a man is naturally predisposed to seek external solace for domestic trouble, and to that extent his conduct might claim a more lenient judgment. But our sympathy for Hugo is lessened, if not wholly abolished, by his arrogant and self-satisfied tone in the matter. His infatuation for Juliette Drouet excited, of course, surprise and consternation among his friends. "What!" they exclaimed, "this model husband and father—the poet of the sacred hearth and home—running after an actress!" And they talked and wrote to one another in amazement, with a tendency, however, to excuse their friend and to suppose that he would soon recover from this temporary hallucination.

"It is very seldom" (writes David d'Angers) "that one can find Hugo at home now; he only goes there at meal-times. Poor Madame Hugo! . . . How fatally a *liaison* of this sort changes what was gold into lead! Not content with the struggle of Romanticism, he has desired also the excitement of life, and he has become entangled in it like another Laocoön. . . . But I hope that some day his noble heart will realise its fall, and then we shall have magnificent pages of self-reproach and bitterness against the weakness of man. . . ."

As a prophecy of regret or repentance on the backslider's part, this letter was singularly wide of the mark. Read beside it Hugo's reply to a letter from Victor Pavie, who had written specially to remonstrate against his revived plan for taking a theatre of his own—this time to give scope to Mlle. Juliette's talents.

"No one understands me, not even you, Pavie, with all your kindness and nobility. . . . The theatre is a sort of Church, humanity is a religion . . . for my part I believe that I am fulfilling a mission. I have never committed more faults than this year, and I have never been a better man—far better now than in my time of innocence which you regret. Yes,

formerly I was innocent ; now I am indulgent. That is a great advance, God knows. I have beside me a dear friend—an angel whom you venerate as much as I do, who pardons me and loves me still. To love and to forgive—that is not of Man, it is of God or of Woman."

This letter is dated July 25, 1833, and the reference in the last lines is of course to Mme. Hugo, who had by this time accepted Juliette as inevitable. But what a tone of complacency ! It is a saint not a sinner who is writing ; and the man who ought to be kicking himself is proudly patting himself on the back.

And now, what of Sainte-Beuve in all this ? We can hardly doubt that he rejoiced in his heart at the appearance of Juliette as favourable to his own designs, though outwardly he joined the others in professions of astonishment and reprobation. But he knew, more than any, Hugo's vulnerable point ; and his criticism in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of the poet's study of Mirabeau (first published separately and then included in the two volumes, 1834, entitled *Littérature et Philosophie mêlées*) contained many a secret sting which his former friend was meant to feel and did feel. Indeed Hugo wrote to him complaining of a certain undercurrent of malignity he detected, and added—by way no doubt of retaliation—that his wife fully shared his feelings. Soon afterwards occurred the final rupture between the two, which on Hugo's side seems indicated by the following letter, dated April 1, 1834 :

"The many hatreds and cowardly attacks I have now to undergo make me realise that even the oldest and most-tested friendships can wear away and perish. Adieu, then, my friend ; let us bury—each on his side—in silence what was already dead in you and what your letter kills in me."

Sainte-Beuve, however, puts the end of their friendship a year or so later, connecting it with his remarks on Hugo's *Chants du Crépuscule* (October 1835). This new volume of verse, which for its general tone of

introspective melancholy may be placed alongside the earlier *Feuilles d'Automne*, contains some of the poet's best-known pieces. In the Preface we are told of "that strange crepuscular state of the soul and of society which marks the present age," and that "in this book will be found all the opposites—doubt and dogma, day and night, the dark point and the luminous point." And so we have the poet revelling once more in all his dearly beloved contrasts, coupling enthusiasm for young France with pious pity for the Bourbons, Napoleonic fervour with humanitarian hopes, the "charter of plaster" with the "evils of granite," the noisy pleasure-seeking crowd outside the church with the silent sorrow-laden woman who prays within, the ladies of fashion and virtue who throng the ball at the Hôtel de Ville with the outcast *demi-mondaine* who watches them as they pass in. But it was the more personal poems which offered a mark to the shafts of the malicious critic. Here might be found another contrast more startling than any, and one which would probably have passed unnoticed by the innocent reader had not Sainte-Beuve made it his business to call attention to it. Several of the poems, it could be seen, were inspired by Hugo's new passion; and yet the book ended with that famous *Date lilia* which celebrates in immortal verse the wife and the family, and in which —as some one said—"conjugal love is a religion where respect sanctifies intimacy and the homage rendered by a man to his beloved spouse is as grave and pure as it is tender." After the "roses and raptures" of—Juliette, the "lilies and languors" of—Adèle! It is clearly implied too that—as was said in the letter to Victor Pavie already quoted—Mme. Hugo had forgiven her husband and was prepared to tolerate his infidelity. The fact that this was true would make it none the more palatable to Sainte-Beuve, who had some nasty things to say about "Dalila" and the "bad taste" of this juxtaposition, and who now discovered in the

poet a number of defects he had hitherto ignored—his "lack of proportion," his "false imagery," his "forced and theatrical lyricism," and so forth (*Portraits Contemporains*). It is these criticisms that Sainte-Beuve regards as marking the end of everything between Hugo and himself. "For," says he, "whatever else he might forgive, I knew him well enough to be sure that he would never pardon depreciation of his writings." It was about this time also that the critic began that *Journal* to which he consigned some still more candid opinions on the character of his ex-friend. There Hugo is written of as "the egoist insatiable of praise, and the coarse-fibred man (*l'homme grossier*) who, when he wants to obtain from you some service flattering to his self-esteem, does not scruple to bring into the conversation his wife's name if he fancies that you are a little bit in love with her; he doesn't see any indelicacy in doing that—it seems to him quite legitimate tactics."

So Sainte-Beuve, it is clear, was very much annoyed. At what? If we have hitherto avoided expressing any opinion of Mme. Hugo's attitude in all this affair, it has not been from lack of politeness—rather the contrary. Let us disengage the certainties of the matter from its speculations. We know that Mme. Hugo had a warm regard and friendship for Sainte-Beuve which she kept up to the extent of angering her husband; we know that she had, in 1833, the very good reasons we have seen for resenting her husband's conduct and for revenging herself—had she so desired—in kind; we know, finally, that, whatever leanings she may have had, her husband's influence soon prevailed, and that, although—not having (as her husband had) any literary quarrel with Sainte-Beuve—she continued always to keep up friendly relations with him, it was a friendship which was neither concealed from Hugo nor disapproved of by him. This fact—the fidelity of the wife to her husband under a provocation which might well have shaken it—explains the irritation of Sainte-Beuve. It

also supplies partly an answer to the delicate question—how far did Mme. Hugo respond to her lover's advances ? On this point we have on the one side the voice of scandal, which is worth little, and the voice of Sainte-Beuve, which—under the circumstances—is worth less. On the other side, we have the character of a woman whose devotion to duty is well attested ; we have the fact that among the multitude of Mme. Hugo's letters to Sainte-Beuve which have come to hand not one conveys a suggestion of illicit passion ; we have, above all, the evident animosity of Sainte-Beuve not only against Hugo but against Hugo's wife, indicating not a gratified but a disappointed love. Such being the facts, it is clear where the benefit of the doubt should be given. We may reasonably, also, consider the probabilities of the case from our general knowledge of feminine nature. It is admitted that Mme. Hugo liked Sainte-Beuve, sympathised with him, was sorry for him—because of his intellectuality, his devotion to her, his plainness and so on—yes, and "pity" (we shall be told) "is akin to love." To a certain sort of love, no doubt—to platonic and sentimental affection—but not to passionate love. Experience shows that as a rule a woman gives herself in the first instance to a man because she admires him, because he is handsome, strong, successful, and for a hundred other reasons or caprices, but not because he appeals to her compassion.

Leaving, however, the contentious philosophy of love, we may finish off with this story by a slight anticipation of dates. After his rupture with Hugo, Sainte-Bueve continued for a while to pose as the lover of Hugo's wife—so long, that is, as he cherished any hopes of success. It must be remembered that his *amour-propre* no less than his affection was at stake in the matter. He had set himself to make this conquest ; he had already allowed one or two of his friends—Ulric Guttinguer, for example—to suppose

that his love had been recompensed ; it was necessary at all costs to keep up this character. And so, when George Sand took him into her confidence about Alfred de Musset, we find Sainte-Beuve pretending to be afraid of a private interview with her on the ground that it "might make a *certain lady* jealous"—and so on, in the familiar style of insinuations easily made and readily believed. But after a year or two more the lover grows tired and begins to cool down. In 1837 he writes from Lausanne to a friend : "Love is adjourned : shall I ever resume it, or have I passed the age for loving ?" And in a letter to Guttinguer he complains that he is the victim "on one side [*i.e.* Hugo's] of dark sinister devices, on the other [*i.e.* Mme. Hugo's] of the most stupid credulity," which, being interpreted, is clearly an expression of disgust at the predominance of Victor's influence over his wife.

Henceforth Sainte-Beuve's thoughts turned towards revenge. In the early days of his love he had expressed the fullness of his heart in a poetic diary which he fondly called his *Livre d'Amour,* and the greater part of which was written between 1830 and 1833. And now, what more delicate instrument of hatred could he find than to divulge a work in which fact and fancy were so skilfully blended that their separation would be practically impossible ? The reader who turns to the *Livre d'Amour* in the hope of gratifying a morbid or prurient curiosity will be disappointed. All is refined, ideal, poetic ; its sting lies wholly in what is implied—that the mighty and masterful Victor had been fooled by his wife, just like any ordinary *cocu.* In the parts written doubtless after the final quarrel the animosity against Hugo is very apparent. He is never mentioned by name but is often referred to in phrases like "le dur jaloux," "l'orgueilleux offensé," &c., and in general is represented as a sort of tyrannical ogre, the terror and oppression of his wife. In the most valuable copy of the *Livre d'Amour*—that which is now included

with the *Poésies Complètes* (edition of 1840) in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and which has recently been reprinted in full [1]—this bitterness is emphasised by later annotations; *e.g.* to the verse which runs

> Et je plains l'offensé, noble entre les grands cœurs!

this note, as an afterthought, was added: "No—his is not a noble heart. He is artificial, pompous, essentially vain: all those who have had much to do with him have found this out. For a long time I was his dupe: I was in the cave of a Cyclops and I fancied myself in the grotto of a demi-god."

Of the *Livre d'Amour*—designed of course for private and limited circulation—five hundred copies seem to have been originally printed (1843), the great majority of which were afterwards destroyed by the author himself. Some half-dozen were presented to friends (the Duchesse de Rauzan, Mme. d'Arbouville, &c.), and portions of a few were bound up with other of Sainte-Beuve's poems. On the fly-leaf of the particular copy already referred to was written: "Lege atque tace, et fidei tuae commissum secreto in posterum serva"—words rather ambiguous so far as they bear on the writer's ultimate intentions. But we know from other sources that he desired the preservation of a work into which he had put so much of his heart. Whether he was annoyed or otherwise at the mischievous revelation of its existence made by Alphonse Karr in *Les Guêpes* we cannot determine; but this event, together perhaps with some regrets and misgivings, may have influenced him to suppress any further circulation and to leave most explicit directions that the *Livre d'Amour* was never to see the light until the three persons concerned should all be dead.

So much for the history of this book. Interesting alike for its poetic merits and as a "human document," its value as evidence of the relations between Sainte-

[1] *Livre d'Amour*, with Preface by J. Troubat (Paris, 1904).

Beuve and Mme. Hugo is nil. For even if we could disentangle imagination from fact, the wish from the thought it so often fathers, even if we could believe in the good faith of the writer, there would still be contradictions [1] sufficient to prevent any safe conclusion —except, perhaps, that Sainte-Beuve having dreamed a dream had the vanity and bad taste to represent it as realised. As to the relations of the poet and the critic after the end of their friendship, these were naturally limited to the necessities of convention. The two men—previously to Hugo's exile—were bound to meet occasionally, but it was always with the coolness and reserve of slight acquaintances. One day chance brought them into awkward proximity, when, proceeding to a funeral, they found themselves boxed up alone in the same carriage. One may speculate what they talked about during that bad quarter of an hour—the weather or the decline of Romanticism? Vain efforts to bring about a reconciliation were made by mutual friends, notably at the time (1843) when Hugo lost his daughter Léopoldine so tragically—an opportunity on which "vous pourriez rentrer par cette large blessure" as Victor Pavie wrote to Sainte-Beuve. The latter, however, declared that he had made overtures more than once but had always been repulsed, the explanation of which belongs, no doubt, to literary rather than to domestic grievances. And yet—incongruously enough —he could so far swallow his own pride and Hugo's aversion as to appeal to the poet (1844) to support him for the Academy.

But while Sainte-Beuve was thus estranged from the husband, with the wife, on the contrary, his friendship continued to the end.[2] This fact has excited surprise, and is capable of being used as an argument that Mme.

[1] How, *e.g.*, can the view of a lover and his mistress—in the ordinary sense—be reconciled with these words: "Je n'ai jamais tiré de l'amour dont tu m'aimes, ni vanité, ni volupté"?

[2] Mme. Hugo died in 1868, Sainte-Beuve in 1869.

Hugo's relations with the writer of the *Livre d'Amour* had been those which that book implies. For how else could she have had anything further to say to a man who had so grossly libelled her good name? But we must observe that the motives of a woman's conduct cannot be estimated as though they were Laws of Nature, and it would be quite possible to consider that this friendship was maintained for the very purpose of giving the lie to gossip and scandal, and proving the merely allegorical nature of Sainte-Beuve's love-passages. We need not, however, resort to any paradoxical defence, since a far simpler explanation offers itself. There is not the least ground for supposing that Mme. Hugo ever saw the *Livre d'Amour*—at any rate in its entirety. Sainte-Beuve, as we have seen, distributed it in selections, and there are many portions which a woman might accept with pleasure and without offence. Hugo himself was unaware of the book until after his return from exile, at which time his wife had been dead two years; and when some one showed it to him then, he wrote the indignant lines addressed "à S-B," and referring to an angry scene—supposed to have occurred in 1837—in which he had turned the visitor out of his house.

So ends this sorry drama, in which Sainte-Beuve figures undeniably as the villain of the piece; indeed, no printable words are adequate to qualify the conduct of a man who—whether with or without cause, whether explicitly or by suggestion—"gives away" the woman. Nor does Hugo appear in an amiable light. No doubt the affair worried him, and was a mighty affront to his self-esteem; but he had largely brought it upon himself, and his harshness—no less than his arbitrary assumption of the right to please himself while demanding that others should please him—makes sympathy superfluous. That is a feeling to be reserved solely for the third person in this drama. Placed between an imperious husband and an insidious lover, Mme. Hugo showed from the first that same dignity, self-restraint, and fortitude

which she was to maintain through all the trying years to come—years in which she had to be content with a share of the allegiance which belonged by right to her alone. But there is no use in moralising: these things do happen.

But—to return to Victor—what strikes one most is the personal triumph with which he emerged from this period of domestic storm and strife. At the end of it all he remains master of the situation. Not only is Sainte-Beuve routed, bag and baggage; not only has Mme. Hugo thrown in her lot entirely with her husband; but the latter has given up nothing nor abated one jot of his claim to be lord paramount. Mlle. Juliette is still there, and is going to stay—the queen *de facto* accepted in perpetuity and that apparently with only the feeblest protest or resistance from the queen *de jure*, her family, and friends. No more remarkable sign of complete submission can be imagined than this passage in a letter written by Mme. Hugo to her husband:

"I will never insist on the rights which marriage gives me over you. It is my idea that you should be as free as if you were a bachelor."[1]

Truly a triumph, not indeed of virtue, but of the strong will, the resolute temper, the privileges which "genius" supported by sophistry may exact from inferior beings. And so from this whole matter we see firmly established the cardinal article of Hugoist faith, to question which henceforth would be the rankest heresy—an article which, simply expressed, amounts to this: "I, Hugo, guided by My conscience, make laws for My own conduct. What is wrong for other people may be right for Me; what is wrong before I do it becomes right by the fact of My doing it. EGO HUGO!"

[1] This letter (unpublished) is quoted by M. Gustave Simon in *Le Roman de Sainte-Beuve*. Elsewhere one has seen it suggested that the delicacy of Mme. Hugo's health since the birth of her last child, Adèle, may afford an explanation.

CHAPTER IX

1834–1837

Claude Gueux : Fiction and fact : *Angelo* at the Théâtre Français : Mars and Dorval act together : The Preface of *Angelo* : *La Esmeralda* : A tour in Brittany : Hugo's first two attempts at the Academy : The "friends" of Hugo in 1836 : Gatherings at No. 6 Place Royale : Marriage of the Duc d'Orléans and fête at Versailles : Distinctions conferred on Hugo : *Les Voix Intérieures* : Death of Eugène Hugo

MENTION has been made of Hugo's essay on Mirabeau —a brilliant sample of pictorial writing—and the two volumes, *Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées,* in which it was included have been referred to earlier in this book. But there is another prose work of 1834 which claims notice. On the subject of capital punishment, already treated in *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné,* the poet's humanitarian views had been gathering strength, and he now returned to it in the story of *Claude Gueux.* The objection made to the former of these, that it was too much "in the air"—too much abstracted from all details—certainly cannot be brought against the second. For Claude Gueux was no imaginary criminal, but a workman who, having been imprisoned for theft, had murdered the Governor of the gaol, for which crime he had been executed. These things had happened at Troyes two years previously. For the author's purpose —the indictment of a social system which tempts a man to rob and to kill—it was necessary to make an interesting criminal and to place him in conditions which would excite indignation and pity for his fate. And so we find that Claude Gueux is "a respectable man, capable, intelligent . . . of a gentle nature, reason-

able in his actions, dignified in his bearing," and so on—in fact an altogether attractive personality. And why has he originally contravened the law? Because, of course, he is out of work, and has a wife and child cold and hungry; it is for them that he steals a loaf and goes to prison. As a prisoner he is a model of good conduct, and supports the discipline of the place by his influence over the others, irreproachable, in fact, except for a healthy appetite which finds prison fare most unsatisfying. Yet his very virtues make him disliked by the Governor, who subjects him to all kinds of petty persecutions, the most vexatious of which is separation from a fellow-prisoner to whom he had become attached. To all entreaties the Governor remains obdurate, and Claude, after thinking the matter well over, resolves to execute justice by "removing" this unprincipled Governor. At the same time, being above all things fair and reasonable, he warns his enemy and gives him every chance of improvement. Day after day he prefers the same request, each time to be ignored, until at last the cup is full. Calling his fellow-prisoners together he tells them of his purpose, which all approve; and when that morning the Governor enters to make the usual round, Claude—after one final appeal—rushes upon him with a hatchet and slays him on the spot. Naturally the murderer, tried and condemned, pays the penalty on the scaffold, having preserved throughout the frank and fearless demeanour of a martyr who has accomplished his mission.

A poignant story, as even this outline will show, and one which Hugo might be trusted to make the most of. Had it been presented as fiction founded on fact—as an account of things that might have been—no one could complain, and there would be general sympathy with the author's cry for the prevention of crime by education, religion, and improved conditions of life. But the whole case is spoiled by the pretence of authenticity—the claim to be a simple record of "things as

they are." Could any more reckless proceeding be imagined than to take in this way a quite recent instance from real life, and after adorning it with all the arts of romance, to put it forward as a statement of facts and a plea for the abolition of capital punishment? The majority of Hugo's readers would doubtless have never heard of the affair, but any who were sufficiently interested to refer to the police records of two years ago might easily have discovered that the real Claude Gueux was a very different character from the idealised victim of society depicted in the story. The happy home, the wife and child, the chivalrous self-sacrifice, the attitude of lofty and heroic indifference—these, and a score of other details invented to awaken our sympathy, are all conspicuously absent from the history of the real criminal's career as told in the sober language of the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. "I record the facts as they are," says Hugo, and straightway proceeds to travesty them *ad libitum*—surely a fatal course for a man to take when writing with a serious purpose on a serious subject. A cause, however good, must suffer from advocacy of this sort, and Hugo is a far more successful pleader when he confines himself to his imagination—as in the character of Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*—than when he resorts to what he calls "facts."

But neither the interest of the philanthropist nor the unceasing activity of the poet—whose next work was to be *Les Chants du Crépuscule* (1835)—caused Hugo yet to forsake the theatre. The failure of *Marie Tudor* had made him one point to the bad in this precarious game, and he was resolved to recover his loss by another play which, based like *Lucrèce Borgia* on Italian history, should repeat the success of that sensational melodrama. His next venture, *Angelo, Tyran de Padoue*, had its full share of the preliminary worries of dramatic production. To begin with, the cast required two "leading ladies"—each with a very important part—Catarina, the high-bred virtuous patrician,

and "La Tisbé," the daughter of the people, a courtesan (like Marion Delorme) and therefore—by Hugo's system—a far more virtuous and attractive person than the *grande dame*. As *Angelo* was destined for the Théâtre Français, it was certain that one of these big parts would be taken by Mlle. Mars; for the other it would be necessary to engage an actress not on the regular staff of the Comédie. Though Hugo doubtless deemed Juliette adequate to this or any impersonation, expert opinion was adverse and he had to acquiesce. Everything, in fact, pointed to Mme. Dorval as the ideal "La Tisbé"; but would the queen of the Français consent to play on terms of equality with an actress whose reputation had been gained in the Boulevard theatres?

Mlle. Mars, however, raised no difficulty. When Hugo called on her to read and discuss the play, she was most gracious. "By all means," she said, "let your Mme. Dorval come and play." So far, so good. But when, as form and custom required, Mars was asked to choose which part she would take, to the surprise and consternation of every one, she said that she would play "La Tisbé," and Dorval should play Catarina. By this decision, reversing the natural order of things which had been taken for granted, it was easy to see that Mars was determined to prevent the possibility of being overshadowed by the probably great success of Dorval in a *rôle* exactly suited for her. Rather than this, she would herself experiment in a character unlike any to which she was accustomed, while leaving to her rival every chance of failure in the apparently uncongenial part of Catarina. If she had calculated on the other woman declining to accept this arrangement she was mistaken, for Dorval, though disappointed, was all amiability. And so the rehearsals began, during which there were, as may be imagined, many little comedies of jealousy, and—as had happened in the case of *Hernani*—more than one sharp passage between Hugo and Mars caused by that lady's many attempts to increase

the prominence of "La Tisbé" and to push Catarina into the background. On one occasion, when Dorval—whose acting in rehearsals was generally based on the "reserve force" principle—had allowed herself to be so far carried away by her part as to indicate how she meant to play it before the public, Mars was so much alarmed that she urged the author again and again to make some material changes which she pretended would improve the piece. Indignant at this paltry subterfuge of envy, Hugo, who had already made several concessions, now spoke out his mind freely, and told the despotic actress that he would either have his play performed as he wished it or not at all. For a while this conflict of two strong wills produced a deadlock, and Mars was expected every moment to resign her part. But Hugo held the winning card in the fact—which Mars was quite unaware of—that other theatres would gladly bring out his play. Indeed, at this very moment, Harel, now repentant and in rather low water, was imploring the poet to give *Angelo* to his theatre, where George and Dorval could play together—a combination certainly no less attractive than that of Mars and Dorval. To all such entreaties Hugo turned a deaf ear. It was not his habit to forgive, and he had not forgiven the manager of the Porte-Saint-Martin for the failure of *Marie Tudor*. He reminded him of this affair and of his own threat at the time: "I told you your theatre would come to grief, and I shall keep my word."[1] And so ultimately things were patched up at the Français; Mars became reasonable and only asserted her dignity by insisting on wearing as "La Tisbé" a particular Muscovite head-dress which had already done duty in the character of Doña Sol, and which—though it suited the actress personally—was

[1] "M. Harel did, of course, eventually go bankrupt," adds Hugo in his autobiography, giving us to understand that he richly deserved this fate for having once had the audacity to prefer a play by Dumas to one by Hugo!

singularly inappropriate to either an Italian or a Spanish lady.

But why linger over these intrigues and bickerings? When *Angelo* was produced on April 28 each of the leading ladies had her own triumph, all the more remarkable because each was, in a way, playing the other's part. Not less admirable was Beauvallet, the actor representing Angelo, tyrant of Padua and husband of Catarina, whom he attempts to poison but is frustrated by the generosity of "La Tisbé." Though the reception of *Angelo* indicated that it was likely to hold the boards for some time, it seems to have been mainly a *succès de curiosité;* for the receipts after the first dozen performances began to show a steady decrease, and after being played thirty-six times it was withdrawn [1]—soon afterwards to become the subject of renewed litigation between its author and the Comédie. The piece itself might be described as a strong and well-built melodrama, not quite so blood-curdling as *Lucrèce Borgia* but in that style, and containing all the familiar ingredients already employed by the author in his previous dramas —husband, lover, woman in society, woman out of society, evil-looking spy (agent of the Venetian Council of Ten), narcotics, poisons, dark corridors, secret doors, balconies (preferred to doors as usual means of entry), and so on—all lending itself to various parodies. But Hugo as usual would not admit that any play of his could be a simple melodrama, but must always make sure that the public does not confuse him with an ordinary playwright, or miss those "great truths" which he had in his mind when writing. The Preface of *Angelo* (oh! those Prefaces!) contains even more than the usual amount of sermonising about "counter-action of moral forces," "blending of the past and the present, the eternal element and the human, the social and the historic," "a picture not merely of the

[1] When *Angelo* was revived in 1850, the part of "La Tisbé" was taken by Rachel—one of her few appearances in Hugo's plays.

particular men and women, not merely of Man and Woman, but of a whole age, a whole civilisation, a whole people." Again we hear about the educational importance of the theatre, as a place which "shall give to the multitude a philosophy, to ideas a formula, to hidden wounds a balm, to each a counsel, to all a law. . . . In the most beautiful drama there must always be a stern idea, as in the most lovely woman there is a skeleton."

The vague moralising is well enough; but "the drama," we are told, "must be a work of history in its portrayal of manners if not of events," and sometimes Hugo is rash enough to indicate his historical research by reference to the authorities he has consulted. Then the results are peculiar. To *Marie Tudor* he had appended an imposing array of documents among which figured the egregious "Franc Baronum," author of a history of Henry VII.'s reign[1]; and now in his Preface to *Angelo* he parades, with lengthy extracts, certain *Statuts de l'Inquisition d'Etat*, from which, says he, "the author has derived his drama, and from which Venice derived her power." But the so-called *Statutes of the Inquisition* are wholly apocryphal, and once again we have to lament—as in the case of *Claude Gueux*—that Hugo was the victim of this fatal and unrequited passion for "facts."

After *Angelo* and *Les Chants du Crépuscule*, the poet's next work was in the character of a *librettiste*. The success of *Notre Dame* had, he says, brought him many offers from musicians anxious to make an opera out of that subject—among others from Meyerbeer. All these proposals he declined; he had little care for music except as an auxiliary to drama. But what he refused to do in the way of business, he consented to do as a matter of friendship. For Mlle. Louise Bertin, who had

[1] Sir F. T. Marzials in his *Victor Hugo* (1888) was, I believe, the first to call attention to "Franc Baronum," "who," he adds, "cannot well be any other than our old acquaintance, Francis Bacon."

already won some distinction as a composer, was anxious to try her hand on this theme; and Hugo to oblige a family from whom he had received constant kindness, agreed to write the book for which the lady was to compose the music. It was a long affair, lasting off and on for four years, and involving endless changes to suit the composer's ideas; but Victor—as his numerous letters to Mlle. Louise Bertin show [1]—entered into the work in the most friendly and patient way. Finished at last, the opera, called *La Esmeralda,* was produced on November 14 (1836) before an audience the brilliance of which was only marred by the inevitable absence of any occupant of the royal box, in consequence of the news of the death of Charles X. which reached Paris that day. It is difficult to say why *La Esmeralda* had so little success that it was only performed six times. Hugo attributes its failure to the shabbiness of the mounting and the jealousy of rival journals which grudged success to the daughter of the editor of the *Débats.* But neither of these explanations, even if they could be sustained, seems adequate, and doubtless the real cause must be found partly in the fact that the stage version, stripped of all the charm of style which the novel possessed, accentuated the most unpleasing features of the characters represented; partly in the quality of the music, respectable enough, but not of that conspicuous merit which alone would have sufficed to carry so weird a subject.

In complaining of what he calls the *mesquinerie* with which *La Esmeralda* was staged, Hugo observes that during the greater part of the rehearsals he had himself been away from Paris, travelling in Brittany. On this tour he was accompanied by the now indispensable

[1] These letters to Mlle. Bertin are among the most charming in all Hugo's correspondence. Playful, good-natured, cheerful, and encouraging, they are marked throughout by a strain of courtly deference quite in the old-fashioned style. Phrases like "je me mets à vos pieds," "je baise vos mains," &c., are always recurring.

Juliette, whose similarity of tastes in the way of travel and curio-collection was an additional bond of union between the two, whether in town or country.[1] But Brittany seems on this occasion to have somehow incurred the poet's wrath, judging by these extracts from a letter of his written to Louis Boulanger, and afterwards published in the *Vert-Vert*. "When you tell these stupid folk that their town is charming, beautiful, &c., they stare stolidly at you and take you for a lunatic, the fact being that the Bretons know nothing about Brittany. What a pearl it is and what swine they are! . . . And the dirt! You may wash the buildings of this country, but as to the natives, I defy you to wash them. . . . In front of you rises the smoke of a picturesque cottage, with ivy and roses all round it. You admire it and you enter. Alas! the attractive cottage is a horrible Breton hovel where the pigs lie about promiscuously with the inmates. And the pigs, it must be said, are very dirty."

What had the poor peasantry done to deserve these gibes? As the letter refers especially to a visit to Fougères—Mlle. Juliette's birthplace—it has been conjectured that perhaps the inhabitants of that peaceful spot may not have shown a sufficient sense of the honour conferred on them by her ladyship's visit.

However that may be, this year (1836) brought—besides the misfortune of *La Esmeralda*—another small vexation in the failure of Hugo's first two attempts at the Academy. At the former of these elections, which occurred in February, the successful candidate was a certain Dupaty, a playwright of no particular eminence; at the second, which took place in November, the new member, chosen to fill the seat vacated by

[1] In Paris they used to explore together curiosity shops, antiquities, &c., in which things Mlle. Juliette shared her friend's enthusiasm. One day she delighted him by calling his attention to the fact that the towers of Notre Dame formed the initial letter of his name. Hence a significance in the gigantic H so much affected by Hugo in his drawings and woodwork.

Raynouard's death, was Mignet the historian. Academic voting depended on so many cross-interests and side-issues that neither the poet himself nor his friends would have taken these rebuffs much to heart. Victor was young; he could afford to wait. He had the satisfaction, too, of knowing that his candidature was supported by the most distinguished Academicians of the time, Chateaubriand and Lamartine. If votes had been weighed instead of counted he would certainly have headed the poll. Before long he will return to the attack, to the surprise and even the consternation of his immediate friends. For why, said they, should the great poet demean himself to these formalities of paying calls and soliciting votes? Why should he desire a place in that curious collection of antiquities? But Hugo—as will soon appear—had his own reasons for resolving to be of the Académie Française, though for the moment he did not reveal them to his friends.

And when we speak of "friends" we should rather say "disciples," perhaps even "courtiers"; for these terms indicate the kind of friends Victor Hugo now preferred. It was inevitable, perhaps, though melancholy, that as his fame and his consciousness of it increased, he should shed some of those early and genuine personal attachments in which admiration existed side by side with the sense of equality and good fellowship. At any rate it happened—we have evidence of it in letters from some of those early friends. Perhaps they were unreasonable in not recognising that the enlargement of a man's life and interests must remove him—insensibly, involuntarily—from the old footing of intimacy. Certain it is, however, that they complained of Hugo as harsh, self-centered, dogmatic. Others, besides Sainte-Beuve, discovered and lamented his abnormal appetite for praise, his morbid resentment of criticism however friendly. One knows Heine's severe judgments written about this time:

"He is forced and artificial . . . essentially cold and

icy even in his most passionate outbursts. His enthusiasm is merely phantasmagoric—a calculation into which no love enters except self-love. He is an egoist, and to be still more exact—he is a Hugoist."

Again : " Most of his old friends have left him, and it is his own fault ; they have been hurt by his egoism."

Discounting whatever personal or literary prejudice may underlie these sentiments, they point, together with much similar evidence, to a common impression that Hugo cared now only for those people who were prepared to render him unquestioning homage. " It is necessary," wrote one to another, " always to speak to him about himself." The dignity and reserve which had been attractive in his youth were fast developing into an excess of touchy self-esteem fatal to the candour of real friendship : as he became more " the great man " he became less the " good fellow." Hence it followed that the friends of 1836 were not quite the same persons as those who in 1829 used to muster in Nodier's house. The gatherings took place now at 6 Place Royale, where the Hugos had been living since 1832, and where they were to remain until 1848 ; a long residence which has identified the poet with that particular house, and has been commemorated by converting it—with the name of its site changed, or rather changed back, to Place des Vosges—into the Hugo Museum, with which every visitor to Paris is familiar.

It was here that the faithful Hugoists used now to congregate nightly. If the " Cénacle " of 1829 had been more or less of a mutual admiration society, the circle of 1836 was one of exclusive adoration. In the former, which rested on a certain community of literary and artistic taste, Victor had been, so to speak, the chief citizen of a republic ; in the latter—without binding ourselves to believe in the existence of the much-talked-of " throne "—he was practically a despotic king whose word alone was law. And so, besides Sainte-Beuve, there were others who had dropped away, without any

quarrel or even unfriendliness, and we do not find among the regular frequenters of the Place Royale such names as De Vigny, De Musset, Charles Nodier. We find, on the contrary—but it would be invidious to specify—the small fry, as one might say, of Romanticism, with the single and notable exception of Théophile Gautier. But besides the literary element there was also an artistic element; and here we find less change. Louis Boulanger, David d'Angers, the two Dévérias were as closely attached to Hugo as they had been seven years before, and to them others had been added—distinguished as painters, sculptors, or architects. They were useful also to him, both as ministers of his fame with picture and bust, and as controlling—with their various pupils—a phalanx of lusty-lunged supporters for theatrical performances. All these—"the high-spirited youth of the studios and the schools" (as Victor calls them)—worshipped at the shrine, and among them should be mentioned especially the two whose devotion ripened into an intimacy which lasted to the end—Auguste Vacquerie and Paul Meurice. And smile as we may at the enthusiasm of these people, it was at least disinterested and indicated an idealism not always present in "high-spirited youth."

Truly it was a sight to see—that cult of poetry and the poet. Often, of a fine summer evening, outsiders strolling through the Place Royale would cluster beneath the trees and gaze curiously at the windows; and presently, with good fortune, they might see the poet stepping out from the *salon* to the balcony, attended by five or six of his devotees. Like our own "æsthetes" of thirty years ago, they affected a singularity of dress and personal arrangement intended to mark them off from "everyday young men." Not that there was among them any costume *de règle;* so long as it was sufficiently startling, each could wear what seemed him good. Hence an infinite variety in the colours of waistcoats and in the shape and material of coats: one

appearing with hair close-cropped like a convict's, while another indulged in flowing locks which had known no barber's hand for weeks or months; several, again, in defiance of contemporary fashion, sporting luxurious beards.

Amid his motley disciples the Master himself was conspicuous by the sober frock-coat and grey trousers of ordinary *bourgeois* use, by his pale, clean-shaven face, by his fine brow and head. Before long the little group will have left the balcony, and spectators will see only the vague outlines of figures moving about inside the room. But if, anxious for a view of the interior, we should consult some one of the initiated, he would tell us that the disciples' *rôle* was not to discuss but to listen, either to the master's verses recited in his own rich sonorous tones, or to some *ipse dixit* on a literary question—very often a paradox or absurdity, like the remark that "Racine would have been a great man if he had not written tragedies." Says the narrator of this,[1] "I didn't believe a word of what Hugo said, nor —for that matter—did he; but it was necessary to amuse the gallery"! According to the same witness, though the poet's *salon* was sumptuously furnished, it was no part of the evening's programme to supply the company with bodily refreshment; they had to be content with "the feast of reason and the flow of soul" in default of anything more substantial. "I remarked," he says, "to Théo [*i.e.* Gautier, who had introduced him] that there was very little going about in the way of supper—at most a cup of tea for the lucky ones. You had to go there all *soul*, leaving your stomach in the ante-chamber."

And while in the Place Royale the minor stars thus revolved round their sun—while the foremost sculptor of the time was making the first of his two celebrated busts of Hugo[2]—in the larger spheres of politics and

[1] Arsène Houssaye, *Confessions.*

[2] David's second and better-known work was executed in 1842.

society the poet was already a person of consequence. With Thiers, as his letters show, he had for several years been on terms of friendly acquaintance. Guizot was not only one of his warmest supporters for the Academy, but offered him (1836) the State "privilege" of a theatre of his own for the performance of modern drama—an offer which Victor declined for himself but got transferred to his friend Anténor Joly, who thereby became in due course Director of the new Théâtre de la Renaissance. And when Guizot retired from the Ministry in 1837, the next Premier, Count Molé, was equally agreeable. The friendship of these two statesmen would suffice to show that Hugo, whatever Republican sentiments he may have indulged for a while about 1832, had now come to contemplate with satisfaction the indefinite continuance of the July Monarchy. "He was a Liberal," says his intimate ally Granier de Cassagnac, "but thoroughly monarchic." And according to a story quoted by another of the poet's friends,[1] he was overheard one evening in the *salon* of the Place Royale to say, when asked why he had not attended Armand Carrel's funeral: "No, I am not a Republican—I cannot be a Republican; you don't understand why? Well, I am surprised. In a Republic my life wouldn't be worth three days' purchase. The different parties would wrangle with each other to get hold of me, and in less than three days my head would fall."

One would naturally regard this remark as made in jest were it not for Hugo's chronic solemnity about himself. However that be, his monarchism at this time is not in dispute. It is further illustrated by his attachment to the Crown Prince, the Duc d'Orléans, who was both a literary admirer and a personal friend, and to whom—as early as 1834—we find the poet writing to recommend some object of charity. In May 1837 took place the marriage of the Duke with Princess Helena of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, and among the

[1] Théodore Pavie in *Victor Pavie, sa jeunesse, ses relations littéraires.*

wedding festivities was a grand banquet at Versailles, to which Hugo was bidden, together with several other literary people, among them Alexandre Dumas. The quarrel, or unpleasantness, between these two champions of Romantic drama had been made up some time during 1836, when we hear of Dumas canvassing for Hugo's Academic candidature; and an incident which now occurred testified their reconciliation. On the occasion of issuing invitations to the Versailles *fête*, it was announced that some decorations and distinctions were to be conferred, among which Hugo was mentioned for promotion from Chevalier to Officer of the Legion of Honour, while Dumas was to be made a Chevalier. When the list was presented to the King he struck out Dumas' name. Alexandre, hearing of this on the day before the banquet, came to Hugo furious with his grievance, and announced his intention of sending back his invitation. His friend sympathised, and declaring that in that case he would not go either, at once wrote to the Duc d'Orléans to explain why he could not be present. The good-natured Duke immediately went to his father and put things right. Dumas was to have his Chevalier's Cross, and might start wearing it at once. And so the two friends went together to Versailles, each having donned—since some kind of uniform was necessary—the National Guard dress of 1830, to which no objection was taken. Strolling through the grounds, the first person they met was Balzac; he also had had to face the costume problem and had attired himself as a Marquis in clothes which (says Hugo) "were probably hired for the occasion, and had certainly been made for some one else." The dinner lasted from four to six; then came a performance of *Le Misanthrope* in the theatre of the palace. Hugo remarks that the guests were almost all men, the only ladies present being the wives of Ministers and Ambassadors, and that this fact detracted considerably from the appearance of the house. He recalls vividly

the scrambling and crushing to get places in the theatre, and how, as they passed down a long gallery with a floor waxed to the smoothness of ice, the slipping and falling of many august personages caused both alarm and merriment. After the play there was a torchlight promenade through the picture galleries, and by eleven the entertainment was over. It was noticed on this occasion that King Louis-Philippe, while gracious to all his literary guests, was especially so to Hugo ; nor were the Duc d'Orléans and his bride less attentive. Could there have been a prettier compliment than the remark of the Duchess, when he was presented to her : " The first building I visited in Paris, M. Hugo, was *your* Notre Dame." And she went on to say how greatly she admired his poetry, much of which she knew by heart.

A further mark of esteem followed a week or two later, when the poet, just after the publication of his *Les Voix Intérieures* (June 27, 1837), found waiting for him at his house a large handsome picture with this inscription on the frame : " From the Duke and Duchess of Orleans to M. Victor Hugo." This picture was Saint-Evre's *Inez de Castro,* a gift all the more appropriate because—though the givers could not have known it—that ill-fated Queen had (as we have seen) formed the subject of one of Victor's early schoolboy dramas. At the beginning of July Hugo's promotion to be Officer of the Legion of Honour was gazetted, together with Dumas' nomination as Chevalier. These marks of Royal and Ministerial favour conferred on the leaders of the Romantic school were bitterly resented by the old " Classicists," the foremost of whom, Viennet—one of the signatories of the futile petition to Charles X.—wrote a sarcastic letter to the papers, in which he said that, like the generals of the old Napoleonic Army, he had ceased to wear his own ribbon, finding it easier nowadays to be recognised without a decoration than with one. " It is natural enough," he continued, " for a Romantic Minister (*i.e.* Salvandy) to reward his friends ; it would,

however, be more just to give the Chevalier's cross to people who have the courage to read through the works of these gentlemen, and the Officer's cross to those who can understand them."

Poor M. Viennet! His lament must indeed have seemed preposterous at a moment when every one was admiring the exquisite beauties of *Les Voix Intérieures*, a lyrical collection certainly not inferior to, perhaps even wider in range than, any of its predecessors. Here may be found songs of Love and Hope, of Pity and Regret; the pæan of Faith and the dirge of Doubt; and many a slight passing thought, suggested by bird or beast or flower, developed with matchless skill of imagery. Here also—would that they were absent!—are indications of that immense power of vituperation which, when applied to worthy objects (as the denunciation of the man who had betrayed the Duchesse de Berry), makes Hugo the great master he is of satire and invective, but which unhappily is just as often employed in gratifying the petty spite of wounded vanity. Woe, now henceforth and evermore, to the miserable critic who may presume to refer to the poet's work in any terms save of unqualified praise. Such a one will never be forgiven or forgotten. For the present he will be compared to a "venomous toadstool,"[1] but that is not enough. Later on—twenty and forty years afterwards (for Hugo knew no Statute of Limitation)—he and other similar offenders will be pilloried in scathing verse. Rather unworthy, one cannot help thinking, of one who, grandly styling himself "Olympio," claims to survey men and things with the lofty vision of the philosopher and prophet. But, after all, the occupants of Olympus were very human; and this blemish apart, the "inner

[1] See *Les Voix Intérieures*, XIII. The writer's name is not mentioned in this passage, but M. Biré gives reasons for supposing that the reference is to Nisard, who had contributed to the *Revue de Paris* (January 1837) a criticism on Hugo, and who in other of the poet's works (*Les Châtiments*, *L'Art d'être Grand-père*, &c.) is attacked by name.

voices" appeal to many of the finest human feelings. One of them, especially, will awaken the sympathy of all —that which the poet dedicates to the memory of his ill-fated brother, Eugène, whose long and hopeless mental disease—beginning, it will be remembered, on the day of Victor's marriage—had just ended in death. As boys and young men the brothers had been inseparable; as joint-editors of the *Conservateur Littéraire* they had shown the same tastes and aspirations, and—in the opinion of many—an almost equal promise of the future. Then came the catastrophe which parted their ways asunder, consigning the one to gloom and oblivion, while the other went on forward to fame and greatness.

CHAPTER X

1837–1843

Victor Hugo, "Vicomte" : Action against the Comédie Française : Racine and Hugo : *Ruy Blas* and others like it : *Les Jumeaux* and its non-completion : Third candidature for the Academy : *Les Rayons et les Ombres* : Its significance : The "Return of the Emperor" : Hugo elected to the Academy : His reception : His object in becoming an Academician : The favour of Royalty : Lawsuit *re Lucrèce Borgia* : *Le Rhin* and Hugo's European policy : Death of the Duc d'Orléans : *Les Burgraves* : End of Hugo's career as a dramatist : Marriage of Léopoldine Hugo : Her death

HITHERTO, since General Hugo's death, Victor, in official and formal declarations, had signed himself "Baron"; now, dating from his brother Eugène's death, he assumed the title of "Vicomte." His theory on this subject is rather bewildering, but seems to have been that as the eldest brother Abel had inherited from the father the style of "Comte," that of "Vicomte" belonged to the second son, Eugène, on whose death it passed to him. Doubtless courtesy titles like this had often been taken by younger sons; but they had no foundation in law, since the Napoleonic code laid down a strict system of primogeniture. That, however, matters little: the point is that Hugo's father was never a French "Count": his title, given him by King Joseph, was purely a Spanish one, not confirmed by the Emperor and not recognised outside of Spain. General Hugo admitted this and never called himself anything but "General"; nor is he described as "Comte" in the ordinance of Charles X. which appointed him to the rank of Lieutenant-General (1825). There, was, therefore, no question of "Counts" and "Viscounts"; and

Victor's assumption of the title, like his claim to descent from the aristocrats of Lorraine and like many other things in his career, was purely a work of imagination. Still, he stuck to his fancy, and, as it harmed no one, no one seems to have minded.

"M. le Vicomte" soon found himself at loggerheads once more with the authorities of the theatre. The object of this, his third litigation, was to claim damages from the Comédie Française for non-fulfilment of contracts binding them to perform his dramas a certain number of times—the plays in question being *Marion Delorme*, *Hernani*, and *Angelo*. There was practically no defence except that the representations would have entailed considerable loss—a defence which was hardly relevant but one which Hugo, who pleaded in person besides employing an advocate, set himself to disprove, handling his facts and figures with a skill which showed that a poet may also be a very good man of business. He won his case, getting 6000 francs damages together with an injunction against the other side to perform the plays within specified times under penalty of 150 francs for each day in arrear. So far as the Comédie was concerned, the terms of the injunction were modified by an amicable arrangement satisfactory to both parties, between the author and the *sociétaires;* but it was characteristic of Hugo to note down in his black book the name of Maître Delangle, the advocate who had appeared against him, and to include the poor man years later among the various people who were "chastised" in *Les Châtiments*. Not less characteristic is a letter written by Hugo just after his success in this action to Victor Pavie (November 28, 1837), lamenting in the strain of the psalmist that false friends have betrayed him and that his enemies have compassed him round about. Again, as in *Les Voix Intérieures*, "Olympio" is beset by the idea, which will never leave him, that there exists against him a conspiracy of hatred and envy. Singular delusion in one of the

most pugnacious men who ever lived! But it serves for the necessary antithesis. "Against all these troubles," he writes, "I have cloistered myself in the sanctuary of my home. There, with my wife and children, is the tranquil and happy side of my destiny." (Juliette was no doubt another refuge, but she is not mentioned.)

Yet, though the law might compel the Comédie to perform Hugo's dramas, it could not compel the public to go to see them. Indeed, there were signs of a reaction in favour of the genuine Classic drama, which had suffered in the movement of 1830 by being confounded with its later and baser imitations—the drama of Corneille and Racine, "Classic" not "Classicist." All that was wanted to restore the old masterpieces to popularity was an actor or actress of genius, and that want was supplied by the appearance (1838) of Mlle. Rachel, whom every one was soon rushing to see in *Andromaque, Phèdre,* &c. This revival of Racine was an impertinence which could not go unchallenged by the admirers of Hugo. And so to the rescue came that faithful scribe Granier de Cassagnac, who was now chief editor of Girardin's new paper, *La Presse,* and who had lately been promoted, on the poet's special request, to the Legion of Honour as a recognition of "his services to the cause of order." Cassagnac had once bludgeoned Dumas for the benefit of Hugo and he was now equally ready to bludgeon Racine; which accordingly he did in a series of articles in *La Presse.* This journalistic thunder was by way of clearing the air for another specimen of the modern drama which the master had just completed for the opening of the recently erected Renaissance theatre. The new piece was *Ruy Blas,* widely known for the extravagance of its central idea, for the beauty of its form and language, for several touches of genuine comedy (absent in Hugo's last two or three dramas), and above all for the masterly impersonation by Frédérick Lemaître of the

lackey-hero, which mainly contributed to the success of the play.

The inauguration of the Renaissance and the first night of *Ruy Blas* formed together an attraction for "all Paris"—beginning with the Royal Princes. Among that distinguished audience were many who, knowing their *Précieuses Ridicules,* must have been struck with the similarity of Ruy Blas' position to that of Jodelet and Maxaville (valets in each case posing as gentlemen in order to humiliate proud ladies); and these may well have doubted whether an idea turned to such good account by Molière as farce is equally effective when transplanted to the domain of tragedy, or pseudo-tragedy—whether, in short, the dramatist's principle of mingling grave and gay, sublime and grotesque, has in this case yielded a quite satisfactory blend. Other critics have noted, as perhaps suggestive, a certain parallelism between the story of Hugo's hero and that of Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons,* Bulwer Lytton's drama which had been performed in London some months before *Ruy Blas* was begun. But these coincidences, where play-writing is concerned, do not much matter; nor do the various historical inaccuracies which research has revealed in what professes to be a true picture of the Court of Charles II. of Spain. The only vital question is, what sense of the probable or possible does the play itself produce; and on this point the average of educated opinion was doubtless represented by a critic who was also a warm admirer of the poet, and who remarked to him that it was very difficult to accept as possible, under the given conditions, that intrigue between the Queen of Spain and a valet. "My dear Merle," replied Hugo in his loftiest manner, "I intended my drama to contain things beyond the range of your vision, and I see that I have succeeded." That seems to settle the question—and all similar questions.

So far France, England, Italy, and Spain had divided

equally between them the "history" in Hugo's plays. For his next subject he returned to the annals of his own country and bethought him of that fascinating legend of "the Man in the Iron Mask," who was believed by some to have been no less a person than the unfortunate twin-brother of Louis XIV. Following this theory,[1] Hugo began a play entitled *Les Jumeaux* ("The Twins"), but half-way through the third act he relinquished it, and the drama remaining unfinished was only published, as a fragment, after his death. The MS. was broken off with the words, "Interrompu le 23 Août par la maladie"; and the illness was no doubt that weakness of the eyes by which Hugo for several years was troubled. Nothing beyond the bare fact of the piece having been begun is mentioned in *Hugo Raconté*, but a curious explanation of its non-completion was given years later by one of the poet's secretaries[2] and most intimate friends, who professed to be quoting the Master's own account. According to this, Hugo having talked about his play and read some scenes of it to a few friends, one of these latter incautiously mentioned the subject—and one strong situation in particular—in the presence of Alexandre Dumas, who, delighted with the idea, proceeded "soon afterwards" to use it in his novel *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*. Hearing what had happened, Hugo, in annoyance, threw away his unfinished MS. As this accusation did not appear until some time after Dumas' death, he had no opportunity of refuting it; and though it would be rash to affirm that Alexandre was incapable of such a proceeding, it is very difficult to accept the explanation as credible. For *Les Jumeaux* was begun not later than 1839, and *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* did not appear until 1847, when it came as a sequel to *Les Trois Mous-*

[1] Except for stage purposes this theory has, it is needless to say, been long since abandoned. Whoever "the Iron Mask" was, it is now held certain that he was no person of great consequence.

[2] *Propos de Table de Victor Hugo*, by Mme. Richard Lesclide.

quetaires and *Vingt Ans Après*. During those eight years Hugo might have finished and produced *Les Jumeaux* half a dozen times over. Moreover, the story of the *Masque de Fer* was not exactly private property, and a drama in verse would hardly have been interfered with by a novel in prose. The simple fact, no doubt, was that the author—as often happens to authors—having laid aside his piece for a while, found, on returning to it, that it did not please him, and so postponed it indefinitely.

After a few weeks in Switzerland, Hugo was back in Paris in time to present himself once more for the Academy. His strongest opponent on this occasion was the orator Berryer, but as the voting, which took place on December 19, failed after seven rounds to produce the required "absolute" majority, the election was deferred for three months. By that time it happened that there was another vacancy caused by the death of the Archbishop of Paris, M. de Quélen; also, Berryer had withdrawn his candidature. The Archbishop's place was filled by the election, practically unanimous, of Count Molé (against whom as a particular and useful friend Hugo would not stand), while for the other place a new candidate was successful—Flourens, the Secretary of the Académie des Sciences. It had been commonly supposed at first that the poet would succeed to the *fauteuil* of M. de Quélen, and one of the papers had a paragraph which ran thus: "It seems practically certain that Victor Hugo will succeed the Archbishop of Paris." Reading this paper casually in her dressing-room while her hair was being done, Mlle. Dupont of the Comédie Française, who knew and cared nothing about Academic affairs, took the words too literally. Amazed at the intelligence, she rushed out into the green-room and exclaimed to the others who were there: "Just fancy! Here's some news for you! This is a bit overpowering! I don't deny Hugo's great talents, but still . . . well . . . really I

shouldn't have believed it possible. Wonders will never cease! . . . Why, here's Victor Hugo going to be appointed Archbishop of Paris!"

But if the poet failed for the moment to become an Academician, he did something better in publishing *Les Rayons et les Ombres* (May 5, 1840). This fine volume may be regarded as a summary of his previous lyrical work, and, in a way, as a conclusion, for his next book of that sort, *Les Contemplations*, will not appear until 1856. Here we find again—in *Rencontre*, for example—the "sense of tears" and the idea of Pity which had dominated *Les Chants du Crépuscule;* here we find—as in *L'Enfant qui joue* and *Mères*—the inspiration of childhood and of domestic affections which had pervaded *Les Feuilles d'Automne*. One is inclined to add also "undomestic affections"; but perhaps Juliette by this time deserves to be considered a goddess of the hearth. At any rate she cannot be absent from the poet's all-embracing love. The piece entitled *A une jeune femme*—to take only one instance—was clearly for her, and the *Tristesse d'Olympio* was practically dedicated to her.[1] This latter is one of the longer and more pretentious poems which, like the *Regard jeté dans une mansarde*, while illustrating Hugo's immense power of colour and imagery, invited attention also to certain of his methods and mannerisms; especially to one which Balzac—in admiring "the greatest poet of the century"—pointed out, when he commented (*Revue Parisienne*, July 25, 1840) on that habit of using enumeration and repetition "not as an occasional figure of rhetoric but as a regular machine for manifesting thought and even for creating a subject." The same remark, in one form or another, has often been made before and since, and

[1] Says M. Léon Séché (*Revue de Paris*, February 15, 1903): "The MS. of *Tristesse d'Olympio* was annotated: 'Pour ma Juliette, écrit après avoir visité la vallée de Bièvre en Octobre 1837,' this referring to a time when Hugo was visiting the Bertins at Les Roches and when Juliette came and took a little house close by."

may be easily justified by reference to Hugo's poetry *passim*. But *Les Rayons et les Ombres* has another interest beside the poetical or literary ; for it marks the first definite appearance of the writer in his character of *vates*—the poet-prophet whose function is to instruct kings and peoples about the problems of life. This claim, enunciated in the first poem of the book, is easier to make than to make good ; and it might fairly be said that there is a certain mistiness about the instructions we get as to religious and philosophical truth, from which it would be equally possible to deduce a theory of Christianity, of Deism, or of Pantheism. However, let that pass : it is more important to notice that Hugo's assumption of the didactic *rôle* foreshadows clearly his entrance into the field of political and social questions.

But first, before coming to the future, he will pay due tribute to the glory of the past, and will voice once more a sentiment which his poetry for the last ten years had done so much to foster. On December 15, 1840—as bitter a winter's day as ever chilled any ceremony—the remains of the great Emperor, brought from Saint Helena, were solemnly interred in the Hôtel des Invalides. The event was greeted by Hugo with a poem entitled *Le Retour de l'Empereur*,[1] and was followed immediately by the publication of a Napoleonic anthology made up of odes which had already appeared in previous volumes, and which were now brought together—so the *Journal des Débats* announced—"as the homage of the great poet to the great Emperor and with the patriotic object of putting these fine poems within the reach of every purse." A few months later, for the inauguration of the Boulogne column, Hugo wrote a hymn which was to have been sung to music on the occasion, but was eventually omitted because of the offence it might have given to English feeling. This hero-worship had now become so entirely a matter of pious sentiment

[1] Afterwards included in vol. iv. of the *Légende des Siècles*.

unconnected with any practical politics that its celebration involved no danger or insult to the reigning family. Nor indeed did the recognition of another great name of the past which the poet now coupled with Napoleon's when he wrote (December 1840) this letter to Chateaubriand, sending him a copy of *Le Retour de l'Empereur:* "After twenty-five years there remain only the great things and the great men—Napoleon and Chateaubriand. You will allow me to offer you these verses as a mark of my old and deep admiration."

And now at last the time was fully come when the "Immortal Forty," short of stultifying themselves for ever, must open their doors to the most distinguished man of letters of the time. It should be remembered that, as a poet, Victor Hugo had been accepted from the first; of his genius there was never any question. And if from time to time an occasional critic had discovered this defect or that—well, after all, it is the business of a critic to criticise, and in the course of doing so he may happen to say things that are true. Hugo—let us repeat—as a lyric poet pure and simple, would long since have got all votes: the opposition to him—apart from faction undercurrents—had been caused chiefly by the revolutionary position he had assumed as a dramatist. But now it was impossible any longer to ignore the claims of the poet, reinforced as they had just been by *Les Rayons et les Ombres;* and he was accordingly elected (January 7, 1841) by 17 votes against 15 given to Ancelot to succeed to the place of Nepomucène Lemercier.[1] The day of the new member's

[1] Lemercier, one of the most stalwart Classicists, had been a vigorous opponent of Hugo's previous candidatures. Dumas, in his *Memoirs*, tells how on the evening after the last Academic election (February 20, 1840), at which Victor had been unsuccessful, he met Lemercier at the Français, where the latter was abusing Hugo and all his works. After a moment Dumas interrupted him with: "M. Lemercier, you have refused Victor Hugo your vote, but there is a thing you will have to give him one day or other, and that is your place. Beware lest, in return for the evil you are now saying of him, he may be compelled

reception, June 3, was a high day at the Institute. Not within memory had there been such a rush to get seats, or such a crowd of people hastening to secure their places hours before the ceremony began. Ladies especially were unusually numerous—conspicuous among them Mme. Thiers and Mme. Emile de Girardin (known before her marriage as Delphine Gay, the poetess): for their dresses see *La Mode* or other papers of the time. All had been in their seats some time when, shortly before two o'clock, the usual stir and whispering of the audience announced an important arrival; and the Duke of Orleans with the Duchess (wearing a small white hat trimmed with roses), accompanied by the Duchess of Nemours and Princess Clémentine, entered the room and proceeded to the box reserved for them. Not for years had Royalty honoured one of these functions with its presence. Yet it was upon the new Academician, even more than upon Royalty, that the eyes of all were fixed, as he stood there at his desk, holding in his white-gloved hands the speech he was about to read.

"A man of medium height and strong build: his long smooth black hair was parted carefully off a forehead of pyramid shape. . . . His eyes, small and deep-set, gleamed with a restrained and dignified exultation. . . . The white collar, folded over a black satin cravat, formed an admirable frame to a face which is still young, though pale and grave. On his Academician's coat, cut in the latest style and fitting close to the body, he wore the cross of the Legion of Honour; and the green embroidery of the coat harmonised capitally with the waistcoat of white satin and its gilt buttons, the costume being completed by a pair of well-shaped black trousers. . . . M. Hugo carried his head high, and his manner was that of a conqueror entering a

to speak praise of you at the Academy." The prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. Lemercier died a few months later, and it was his chair that Hugo filled.

captured town. No wonder that his appearance excited intense enthusiasm, particularly among the ladies of the audience. His voice is strong and well-toned, while his gesture and delivery—though a little pompous—cannot fairly be called affected."

Thus wrote an eye-witness of the scene.[1] As to the discourse of the *récipiendaire*, it was something of a surprise. Superb as an effort of style and composition, the matter of it, except for a few opening formalities, was what might have been expected, not from a poet and a man of letters, but from a politician—or rather a political philosopher. An eclectic review it might be called of the different phases of French history during the past half-century, in which the reviewer found something pleasant to say about each—Republicanism, Bonapartism, Bourbonism—while reserving his most complete approval for popular monarchy and the present dynasty which represented it. To M. de Salvandy, *Directeur* for the time being of the Academy, it fell to reply; and—by what seemed an inversion of natural *rôles*—he, a former Minister of State, talked literature just as the man of letters had talked politics. Nothing could have been more cordial than his welcome to the new member. It is true that he gently reproached the poet for his apparent desire to leave the sublime heights of genius and descend to the troubled waters of mundane affairs; but this only heightened the tribute he rendered to Hugo's literary work and the unheard-of compliment which he paid to the new-comer by expressing the Academy's regret at not having elected him sooner. It seems that Salvandy's speech was the more applauded of the two—a fact which Hugo would not appreciate. But the motives of the poet's political remarks were soon correctly divined, even as years later they were fully explained in his biography by the "witness," who wrote:

[1] Louis de Loménie in *Galerie des Contemporains illustres.*

"M. Hugo had always from his earliest years been something of a politician: all his books had been connected more or less with public affairs—even *Les Orientales*, the most purely literary of them, had been a plea for the independence of Greece. And as he grew older, he cared less and less for mere self-centred art, believing that the man of letters should be an active force in the world. But the slow and indirect action of literature upon public questions could not for long satisfy him: he wished to strengthen it by the immediate action of politics and to complete the writer by the public speaker. . . . There were two platforms by which he might realise this purpose—the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Peers. A Deputy he could not be, the electoral law at that time being made for people richer than he and requiring a property qualification which he did not possess; and even though he had evaded the law by the common device of borrowing a friend's house and so becoming an owner of house-property, the electors on the restricted register of those days had little sympathy with literary men. To be a thinker, especially a poet, made you, in their eyes, radically incapable of holding sound views in practical matters . . . . There remained therefore the Chamber of Peers. But, in order to be nominated to that body, it was necessary to belong to one of the categories from which the King could select peers, and the only one open to M. Victor Hugo was the Academy."

It is quite plain, therefore, that the poet's primary object in becoming an Academician was to use that position as a stepping-stone to the peerage and to political life; nor, considering his friendship with the Royal family, could there be the least doubt that his ambition would soon be gratified. His high favour with the Duc d'Orléans was obvious to all. Not a reception at Court but he was invited; at dinner, ball, and concert he was a frequent guest. Everything—even the

chance omens—seemed to smile upon the coming man. Meeting Théodore Pavie in the street one day he takes him by the arm and says: "Look here, I must get a white tie for dinner to-night at the Tuileries. Come with me and choose one." "So we went" (Pavie says) "into a shop. The young lady behind the counter—a very pretty girl—as she put the silk tie round Hugo's neck to try it on, lingered a moment, evidently struck by the beauty of the poet's head and his broad brow, and the poet did not fail to notice her admiration." On another occasion, when Victor and Charles Nodier were together at a Court concert, the Duke and Duchess showed them so much polite attention that Nodier, as they came away, remarked: "Upon my word, I shall always vote for the usurping branch if it gives us such amiable Princes as this!"

And not only on formal occasions was Hugo's presence acceptable, but in the unofficial *salon* of the Pavillon Marsan—where the Duke and Duchess resided—he was constantly to be found. This fondness of the Crown Prince and Princess for literary men furnished material for many small jokes to such of the papers as mischievously sought to imply some rivalry between the heir-apparent and his father, and facetious suggestions were made about the kind of Ministry that might be expected when the Pavillon Marsan should have the forming of one—a Ministry in which M. Victor Hugo figured as Premier, M. Théophile Gautier as in charge of Foreign Affairs, and so on. Seriously, however, it was declared that Louis-Philippe was not overpleased at the Duke's inclination to have his own especial *protégés*, and that he said to his son one day: "You know, Ferdinand, there is only room in the Tuileries for one King and one *salon:* mine is quite as comfortable as yours, and I shall be very pleased indeed whenever you and the Duchess can manage to favour me with your company." But to Hugo it could have mattered little whether he was considered

the King's friend or the Prince's friend, since he enjoyed the esteem of both, and under this double patronage was rapidly qualifying himself for entrance into practical politics. At the same time he repudiated the suggestion of some of his friends that he was turning his back on literature. Alphonse Karr, among others, had reproached him with forfeiting his individuality by joining the Academy. "My poor Victor," he wrote wittily, "so now at last you are the equal of M. Flourens: you have become one of the Forty. I hear on all sides that you intend soon to get elected a Deputy—that is, one of the Four Hundred and Fifty. If you go on like this from triumph to triumph, you will succeed at last in becoming one person of the thirty-three millions that compose the French nation!" In reply to his friend, Hugo wrote: "Academies, like everything else, will belong to the coming generation. Meanwhile, I am the living breach through which the new ideas are entering to-day, as the new men will enter to-morrow."

And, as if to show that he abated nothing of his interest in literature, the poet was now asserting his rights against a pirated version of *Lucrèce Borgia*. That drama, soon after its production, had been converted into an Italian opera, the music of which was composed by Donizetti; and now (1841) a French translation appeared and was performed at one or two provincial theatres. Against the translator and publisher of this version the author brought a successful action for infringement of copyright, the effect of which was, however, nullified by the simple expedient of altering the title and changing the words and the names of the characters. The case shows Hugo tenacious, as ever, of his strict legal rights; for no practical harm could possibly be done to the drama by representing it in operatic form, and it was ultimately arranged that, in consideration of a nominal indemnity both *Lucrèce Borgia*

and *Hernani* might be given as operas under their proper names.[1]

More important than this rather petty affair were the two volumes which appeared in 1842 (and were three years later supplemented by a third) entitled *Le Rhin.* This book, the result of travels in 1839, assumes primarily the form of letters to a friend in Paris written by the tourist in the course of his wanderings—written casually as he "sat of an evening at the table of an inn-parlour, amid the bustle and clatter of preparations for supper." Wonderful letters, indeed, to have been thus fired off, *currente calamo;* and constituting—with their array of facts and names and dates—a monument of erudition and memory (see especially Letter XXV.) for any who can believe that they are printed as they were written, without recourse to a single authority or work of reference. There is abundance, of course, of the inevitable antithesis ("You know," says the writer, "that the *bon Dieu* is the great maker of antithesis," and we can easily understand the implication that Hugo was a good second); a certain amount also of laboured jocosity, exaggerated pleasantries, ponderous puns, words played upon—up and down, inside and out—over pages. And so, in spite of many brilliant descriptive passages such as the scenery of the Rhine would be sure to inspire in a poet and an antiquarian, the letters—viewed as a *livre intime*—are hardly a success. They have no such combined charm of *esprit* and heart as the letters of Mme. de Sévigné, nor any of that genial naturalness which makes the *Impressions de Voyage* of Alexandre Dumas a perpetual delight. In short, Hugo cannot make himself familiar; he cannot divest himself of the

[1] Every one of Hugo's dramas, except *Angelo*, received at one time or another musical honours. Of *Hernani* three different operas were made, the best known being that composed by Verdi (1844), who was also responsible for *Rigoletto* (1851) based on *Le Roi s'amuse.* Of *Ruy Blas* there were no fewer than five versions—three Italian, one English, and one Spanish.

lyric strain, and that strain is inappropriate to this kind of literature. It is quite different when we come to the second—or "legendary"—part of the Rhine book, where in the romantic tale of *Le Beau Pécopin* the poet found a material well suited to his genius. Yet it was neither the first part nor the second that contained the author's end and purpose. Both these were, indeed, merely an excuse—rather a lengthy one—for the last two hundred pages. Here, in the "Conclusion," we have the writer appearing as a statesmen with a scheme of European policy.

What had happened? Hugo had "discovered" the Rhine, much as Dumas on a famous occasion "discovered" the Mediterranean. Why did it happen? Clearly because the poet, with his intention of entering political life, desired to show himself a man of wide and comprehensive outlook. How did it happen? He tells us in his own graphic fashion: "You have but to open your window on the Rhine, and you see the past. Then to see the future you open another window—in yourself." So he opened both windows, and in this flood of light from past and future solved the problem of the present. The substance of the solution was that France and Prussia should be natural friends and allies—France getting back the left bank of the Rhine, and Prussia being solidified and extended to the Ocean. England and Russia as two self-seeking and reactionary Powers should be obliterated from the map of Europe—the one being relegated to the sea and the other to Asia. To mitigate the harshness of this treatment Hugo disclaimed any ill will against the rulers of these two benighted countries. He was not yet the enemy of kings, and indeed he spoke of the Tsar Nicholas as a "noble and pious emperor," while the accession of Queen Victoria was a "blessed event"; but still the policy of each of these two countries was an obstacle to civilisation, and therefore they must go. It is needless to say that this advocacy of the aggrandisement of

Prussia, so far as it attracted any notice, did not meet with the approval of French politicians. What impression it might have made at the Tuileries we know not, for the Tuileries at this moment was stricken by a domestic grief which overshadowed all else. On July 13 (1842) occurred the lamentable carriage accident which resulted in the death of the Duc d'Orléans—an event by which Hugo, we cannot doubt, was deeply affected. By chance it fell to him to compose and deliver the formal address in which the Academy tendered its respectful sympathy to the King and Royal Family. The language of this address was in some quarters criticised severely as too rhetorical for the occasion, though it would be unfair to argue from this any insincerity in the loyal sentiments it contains.

To return to the Rhine. As that river had supplied Hugo with so much food for speculation on the past and future, so it supplied him also with the subject of what was to be his last acted play. *Les Burgraves*, written in 1842, was produced at the Français on March 7, 1843. But first, once more a lawsuit, this time brought by the actress, Mlle. Maxime, who (Rachel having declined it) had been engaged to play the part of the aged Guanhumara, and who, after a certain number of rehearsals —since her rendering did not please the author—was displaced in favour of another. Mlle. Maxime in disgust sued the Comédie Française and M. Victor Hugo. She was unsuccessful, but had the satisfaction of knowing that the author feared her resentment when the first night should come. What a cabal of opposition she and her sympathisers might raise against the piece! It seems that Hugo, anxious about this, sought to propitiate her. "My dear sir," she said to him, "do not be uneasy. On the day your drama is produced, I shall beg all my friends—known and unknown—to stay at home; or, if they go out, to get a police certificate as to where they have spent the evening. Will that satisfy you?"

It was certain, however, that this ambitious "trilogy in the Æschylean style" would invite as much hostility as its predecessors. All the more disconcerting was it to find that the phalanx of *chevelus*, "the long-haired brigade," whose plaudits had supported *Hernani* and the other earlier plays, was now no more forthcoming. They had grown older, and their enthusiasm had waned; they were occupied now in business or professional life; they had married and become domestic; in a word, the "high-spirited youth" were no more. This was evident when Auguste Vacquerie, acting in Hugo's interests, went to Célestin Nauteuil the painter—from whose studio and friends so many stalwarts had formerly come—and asked him if he could supply three hundred young men or so. Said the painter sadly: "Go and tell your master that there are no more young men. I cannot produce the three hundred." Nevertheless, when the evening came, the house was carefully packed with the author's friends, so that the *Débats* and other sympathetic papers were able to describe the play as a triumph. But with the second performance, and before a larger proportion of the paying public, it was evident that *Les Burgraves*—in spite of extensive cuts which had been made to reduce its length—was doomed to failure. Hostile outbursts were frequent, and even those who wrote publicly in its praise confessed privately to one another that it was impossible. A drama, it seemed, on too colossal a scale—an attempt to condense an epic poem into an evening's spectacle, a work less suitable for the stage than for the study. The public damned it more simply as "tiresome," a verdict from which it was saved neither by poetic beauty, nor by grandeur of conception, nor yet by sensational horrors. The abnormal age of the principal characters (beginning with the ninety-year-old Barbarossa) was another feature that attracted ridicule, and some one facetiously remarked that M. Hugo was evidently progressing since in *Hernani* there was only

one "vieillard stupide" while in *Les Burgraves* there were three. In vain did the author preface the published edition of his play with pompous phrases about "giving truth to men's minds, beauty to their souls, love to their hearts"; in vain did he talk about "feeding the multitudes with an idea": "the multitudes" (*one* multitude—as a nasty critic observed—would not be sufficient for M. Hugo) declined to be fed, and kept away from *Les Burgraves*, nor could even one or two clever parodies stimulate their curiosity to see the original. Thus audiences grew thinner and receipts dwindled, while by contrast, on alternate nights when Rachel was playing Racine, the house was always crowded. The signs of the times were conclusive: the public wanted rest and change, and Hugo, weary with the long struggle, retired from the field of dramatic authorship. As "the witness" puts it: "M. Hugo no longer cared to expose his thoughts to easy gibes and anonymous hisses; moreover, he had less need of the theatre now, as he was soon about to speak from the tribune."

But before this new epoch began, Hugo was to suffer another of those great sorrows, in presence of which we think not of the writer and the politician but simply of the man. And just as the last chapter ended with the loss of a brother, so we have now to record the more cruel bereavement which made September 14, 1843, a black day for ever after in the poet's memory. The domestic life of the Place Royale, now that the trouble between Hugo and his wife was—outwardly at least—composed, had settled down into a fairly peaceful state. There was no doubt of the father's affection for his children, and visitors to the house often found a happy family group—father and mother, the two sons—Charles and François-Victor (aged respectively seventeen and fifteen, both high up at college and, as some one remarked, "more advanced in literary theories than their teachers"), and the two daughters—Adèle (or

"Dédé,") as yet a child in the doll stage, and Léopoldine, the eldest of the four, a refined and sensible girl whom people still spoke of and addressed by her baby-name of "Didine," forgetting that she was now a young woman of nineteen. It was with some surprise, therefore, that they learnt of her marriage, on February 15, to M. Charles Vacquerie of Havre, a brother of Hugo's devoted disciple Auguste Vacquerie. The engagement had been short and the wedding was a very quiet affair, only relatives and one or two intimate friends being present at the church of St. Paul and at dinner in the evening at the Hugos' house. One of the friends was Robelin the architect, to whom a few days before the ceremony Mme. Hugo wrote asking for the loan of some plates and knives for the dinner to which twenty-four would sit down; another was Louis Boulanger, whose name appears among the signatures in the register. It was purely a love-match and had every promise of happiness.

In the summer the young couple went to stay at Villequier on the Seine, where Vacquerie's mother had a house. They were frequently, of course, on the river, and on one especially fine morning, September 4, the husband, having business at Caudebec, some three miles up, embarked on a small boat with his wife, his uncle, and the latter's son. They were returning home: the breeze of the outward journey had dropped and hardly a breath of air was stirring. Suddenly, without warning, a violent gust of wind swept down from beneath the hills which border the Seine in this part, struck the sail and capsized the little craft. Of the four occupants Charles Vacquerie alone reappeared. He at once rose to the surface, crying for help, and being a strong swimmer he dived beneath the boat, from which he struggled to detach Léopoldine's panic-stricken grasp. Twice, thrice, six times he went under and came up—in vain. Unable to save his wife he chose to die with her. Their bodies were found closely clasped together: recovered—as well as

those of the other two—they were laid out side by side in the church at Villequier. Neither of the parents was at hand, though Mme. Hugo was no farther off than Havre, whence friends took her back distracted with grief to Paris. Victor had been travelling in Spain, and in constant correspondence with his daughter. He was now back in France and his last letter, written from Saint-Jean-de-Luz, reached her on September 3, the day before her death. But as, while moving about, he gave no address and was moreover travelling under an assumed name, he did not learn until September 9 what had happened on the 4th. How he then heard of the calamity, his letter of September 10 to Mlle. Bertin tells us :

" . . . Yesterday I had been for a long tramp through the marshes under a blazing sun. Tired and thirsty I reached the village of Soubise, and entered a *café*. They brought me a glass of beer and a newspaper —*Le Siècle*. I opened it and read : that was how I learnt that she who was the half of my life and of my heart was dead. . . ."

The village of Soubise referred to is close to Rochefort, in which town the event was known on the 8th. Hugo returned immediately to Paris, to find many sympathetic references made in the Press to his loss, and to receive all the consolation that friends could give. But, as one of them wrote : " The house in the Place Royale is now all gloom and silence, broken only by the agonised sobs of the poor mother as she lies on her bed holding in her hands some tresses of her daughter's hair. Hugo sits sadly with his two boys, while the little girl has not yet been told the whole truth—she has been allowed to think that it is only M. Vacquerie who is dead."

Years later, when the poet publishes his *Contemplations*, it will be Léopoldine's death that makes for him the dividing-line between *Autrefois* and *Aujourd'hui*.

CHAPTER XI

1844–1849

Academical orations : Hugo and Louis-Philippe : Hugo becomes a Peer of France : £ *s. d.* : A regrettable incident : Hugo in the Chamber of Peers : The Revolution of 1848 : Hugo as a Representative : Character of his Parliamentary Speeches : Some specimens of *Actes et Paroles* : Foundation of *L'Evénement* : Its policy : Election of President : End of the Constituent Assembly

As if to divert private grief by public activity, Hugo now set himself assiduously both to his duties as an Academician and to the prosecution of his political aims. It was on his proposal that a prize of 1500 francs had been awarded to Mlle. Bertin for some poetic "gleanings" she had published, concerning which he wrote gracefully to her that "the Academy was becoming sensible in its old age, and that whereas it used to reward *verses* it now rewarded *poetry*." In the course of three years Hugo served for two quarters as "Director" of the Academy, and for one as "Chancellor." In the former capacity he delivered the reception speech on the admission (January 16, 1845) of Saint-Marc Girardin, an eminent University professor, whose stringent criticism on the modern drama made him anything but a congenial subject for polite remarks from the most conspicuous exponent of that drama. It was easy, however, to talk at large—to say little about Girardin and a great deal about literature in these elaborate commonplaces which the speaker could manage so artistically. A still more delicate task, however, fell to his lot at the reception (February 27) of Sainte-Beuve, who replaced Casimir Delavigne after

a keenly contested election, in which Hugo's vote and influence had been given to De Vigny. Would the poet take such an opportunity of revenge as was consistent with the outward forms of courtesy ? If any expected this they were disappointed, for Victor's speech—alike in its reference to Casimir Delavigne and to his successor—was a model of good taste, without the least trace of literary quarrel or personal resentment. All agreed in praising it, even Sainte-Beuve himself, who (in a letter to Victor Pavie) spoke of Hugo having "behaved very well towards me—all the more because there were certain points in my speech which, when it was submitted to him the day before, he had wished me to modify. Yet, in spite of my refusal to do so, he made no change in his complimentary remarks about me."

And, while thus engaged at the Institute, Hugo was keeping in close touch with the Tuileries. The death of the Duc d'Orléans, his chief friend and patron, had in no way lessened his intimate relations with the Royal Family. It was noticed that, when he spoke at Academical receptions, the Duc d'Aumale or the Duc de Montpensier—or both—were present ; it was known that he was in constant and familiar intercourse with Louis-Philippe. Between the old king who had lost a son and the poet who had lost a daughter there was—apart from anything else—the bond of a common sorrow. Long talks they had together, in which all formality was laid aside. One evening, in the winter of 1843, Hugo stayed so late that the servants —thinking that every one had gone and that His Majesty had retired for the night—put out all the lamps in the palace, with the result that Louis-Philippe had himself to light his visitor down the staircase. In *Choses Vues* (under date 1844) we find several references to these conversations. "At home, in the evenings, the King wears no decorations. He is dressed in a maroon-coloured coat with a vest either of black

Sainte-Beuve.

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satin or white *piqué*, and black breeches, silk stockings, and patent-leather shoes. He wears a grey *toupet*—very obvious—arranged in the Restoration style. He is cheerful, kindly, and a good talker."

Again: "The other day the King told me he had only once in his life been in love. 'With whom was that, Sire?' I asked. 'With Mme. de Genlis,' he replied. 'Why,' I said, 'she was your governess!' 'Yes, and a very strict one, too,' he said laughing; 'she brought up my sister and myself with the most ruthless severity.'"[1]

"At Saint-Cloud the King, who seemed worried and tired, made me sit down and, taking me by the hands, said bitterly: 'Why am I so much misunderstood? They say that I am proud, clever, and so on, which means that they think me a traitor. The truth is that I am a plain honest man, trying to do my duty.' . . . He then went on to express some frank opinions about his Ministers, none of whom seem to have given him complete satisfaction. 'They are like a pack of schoolboys,' he said, 'desperately anxious to finish with their tasks. They dislike attendance at the Council, and rush through the most important business that they may get back to their offices or their private affairs.'

"Guizot, of course, was the one he liked and trusted most. Thiers was too clever and self-reliant. Talleyrand had once remarked about Thiers: 'He might be a very useful instrument, but unfortunately you can only use him in the way he chooses to be used. It is a pity for both of you that he cannot be made a cardinal!'"

Enough has been said of these interviews to show that Hugo had ample opportunity of letting the King know what he wanted, and that—so far as Royal

[1] This famous lady lived to see her pupil become King. She died three months after Louis-Philippe's accession. To the last he and his sister, "Mme. Adélaïde," used to visit her.

influence went—he was not likely to be disappointed. His elevation to the peerage—together with that of two or three others—was commonly expected to take place on Louis-Philippe's return from his visit to Windsor (October 1844). That the event was delayed for several months was due, it is said, to the opposition of Decazes and others, who considered, in general, that the peerage was already large enough and ought to be diminished rather than increased, and, in particular, that the appointment of Hugo was unadvisable and superfluous. At last, however, the King's wishes prevailed, reinforced by the direct intervention of the Duchesse d'Orléans, who represented the often-expressed desire of her late husband; and on April 13, 1845, appeared the Royal ordinance which declared, after the usual preamble, that "In consideration of the services rendered to the State by Viscount Hugo, We have decreed and do decree as follows: That the said Viscount Hugo, member of the Institute, be raised to the dignity of Peer of France."

This announcement, although expected, was—it need hardly be said—not allowed to pass without some scathing comments from the Republican Press. "Victor Hugo is dead," wrote *Le National* in the course of a long article; "salute M. le Vicomte Hugo, lyric Peer of France!" More incisive still was this laconic paragraph in the *Courrier des Théâtres:* "M. Victor Hugo is created a Peer of France: *le Roi s'amuse.*"

But the new Peer[1]—who took his seat and the oath on April 28—could afford to smile at these acidities.

[1] It is hardly worth while to do more than notice incidentally a story for which the poet in later years—according to the recorders of his Table-talk—made himself responsible, to the effect that long before this date he might have become a Peer by adoption, if he and his mother had been willing that he should take the name of "Cornet" in addition to that of Hugo; the said Cornet being a cousin of his mother who desired, under the Restoration, to transmit his peerage to young Victor. A full examination of this legend may be found in Biré's *Victor Hugo après 1830* (vol. ii. chap. 4).

Had he not attained the object which, as a lad, he had declared to Soumet, who, asking him what he intended to be, was told, "I intend to be a Peer of France." And had he not fulfilled that other early ambition, "I mean to be a Chateaubriand or nothing"? For Chateaubriand, remember, was a "Vicomte"; and so was Hugo—a sort of a Vicomte, as has been explained.

And in addition to these honours, the poet had now the solid satisfaction of a good income derived from his literary work. Exact figures are not easily obtainable, but we know that he adopted the prudent and profitable course of selling the copyright of his books for a limited period, after which it reverted to him. We know, also, that in the one year 1835 he received from his then publisher 73,000 francs; and that in 1838 he made a contract with the firm of Delloye by which he assigned to it the sole right of publishing his previous works, together with three forthcoming ones (*Ruy Blas, Les Rayons et les Ombres,* and *Le Rhin*), for a period of ten years, for the sum of 300,000 francs (£12,000), a third of which was to be paid down and the balance in two years. There was thus a nice little capital for investment—not to speak of Hugo's official emoluments or of the "author's rights" produced by his dramas.[1] He was evidently, however, anxious that his means should not be over-estimated,

[1] A considerable amount must have been already derived from this source. According to figures published (in *Le Petit Temps*) in 1905, by the late Paul Meurice, it would seem that in the whole period 1830–1904 the gross receipts of theatres from Hugo's plays amounted to about seven million francs, on which he calculated that the author's rights would come to about one million (*i.e.* £40,000, or at the rate of between five and six hundred a year). The figures are given for what they are worth, but they seem to over-estimate somewhat the probable amount of author's fees, which as a rule did not exceed 10 or 12 per cent. It is interesting to know that the most remunerative play was *Ruy Blas,* with total receipts of 2,350,000 francs, next to which came *Hernani.* The lowest takings were those of *Les Burgraves,* which only came to 320,000 francs.

for we find him writing (1845) to the editor of a provincial paper which had spoken of him as "wealthy": "I have been working for twenty-eight years, and in that time I have earned by my pen about 500,000 francs. I have brought up my four children. I have refused scholarships for my boys. To-day, of the 500,000 there remain 300,000, which I have invested; and on the income of that, together with what I make, I live and support eleven people round me. No one connected with me lacks anything, and I do also a little almsgiving—so far as I am able. As to myself, I go about in a 25-franc coat, and wear my hats until they are shabby. I work without a fire in winter, and I go to the House of Peers on foot."

After this complacent catalogue of good deeds it was unfortunate that the beginning of Hugo's political career should have coincided with an episode of private life which laid him open at once to reprobation and to ridicule. In the beginning of July (1845) Paris was shocked or amused by a nine-days' scandal which went the round of the clubs and was referred to more or less openly in several papers. The facts as related—with or without comment—were that "one of our most celebrated authors"—or (in more stately journalese) "an illustrious personage who combines the laurels of Parnassus with the ermine of the peerage"—had been surprised in most compromising circumstances with a lady—the wife of a painter. How long the intrigue might have been going on was unknown; but the husband, Monsieur B.,[1] had been away from Paris, and on his return—his suspicions having been aroused—he had taken a police-inspector with him, and tracked his wife to the rooms which served as a meeting-place for the lovers. He had as yet no idea who the man was, and great was his astonishment to find how distinguished a lover his wife had. Whether this discovery mollified or increased his wrath is not clear:

[1] A. F. Biard.

in any case he had invoked the law, and the law must take its course. The poet, fortunately for himself, was able to satisfy the police-officer of his identity; as a Peer of France he was exempt from arrest, and was at liberty to depart. Not so the unfortunate lady, who was then and there marched off to prison. Hugo, in consternation, hastened home, made a clean breast of it to his wife and implored her intercession. Poor Mme. Hugo—she had only a few months ago lost her father—was now once more a victim to the eccentricities of genius, but with true devotion she did all she could to appease the injured husband and hush things up. In vain: M. B. was bent on his revenge. The course he had taken precluded a duel, though there was some talk of that; but he intended to bring Hugo to trial before the assembled Peers, and with that object he applied to the Chancellor to convoke the Upper House. Every sort of pressure was used to make him drop the matter, but he persisted; and it was at last only the direct intervention of the King which induced him to withdraw his appeal and so prevented a grave public scandal. His Majesty, we can well suppose, was very much annoyed at the affair, and it was not surprising to learn from the papers that M. Hugo, acting on a hint from the highest quarter, had taken out passports for a three months' visit to Spain. In fact he did not leave Paris, but lay very low and waited for the cloud to roll by. "I am very sorry," wrote Lamartine, "to hear of his misfortune; but lapses of this sort are soon forgotten. France is elastic, and a man can spring up again—*même d'un canapé.*"

Quite true, no doubt: yet it is certain that this ignominious affair—which in England might easily have ruined for ever a man's political and social career—did to some extent delay and prejudice Hugo's *début* at the Luxembourg. Among Louis-Philippe's peerage—as shady a lot as ever composed an Upper Chamber—there were, or were soon to be, so many scandals, financial

and other, that as a body they could ill afford even the slight discredit brought on them by this undignified adventure of their new member, which may be recorded without squeamishness, seeing that the poet himself used in after years to refer to all such matters in a cheerful and even a jocose tone.

For the time being, however, it was a distinct set-back, and one from which Hugo did not until seven months later feel sufficiently recovered to venture on his maiden speech in the House of Peers (February 14, 1846). Short and unpretentious, on the prosaic subject of industrial patents, this attracted no particular notice in a thin house. More marked was the coolness with which the Peers received an eloquent speech urging that France should give the strongest moral support to Poland in her distress. Evidently they had not yet forgiven him. In time, however, he gained ground. His speech on coast defence (June 1846) was recognised as spirited and sensible : his fervent support (June 1847) of the petition of Jérôme Bonaparte, that he and his family might be allowed to return to France, seems to have influenced the King into granting that petition. It was the speech in which occurred the words, aptly expressive of a common sentiment : "Come now, I would say to this House, to the Press, and to France, let us talk a little of the Emperor : that will do us all good." At the same time the speaker makes it quite clear that all that belongs to the past, and that for the present France may well congratulate herself on being ruled by "the most illustrious of the sovereigns of Europe."

Under that sovereign—at any rate under that dynasty—Hugo hoped with good reason soon to hold Ministerial office. His diary of this time shows him in constant touch with the highest political personages. Thus : "Dined yesterday [June 12, 1846] with the Duc Decazes, where I met Lord Palmerston and Lord Lansdowne. With the former I had some conversation

about Ireland and the potato disease. . . . Lady Palmerston is graceful and talks well: she must once have been very beautiful." Again (January 14, 1847): "At M. de Salvandy's, I was talking to the Marquis of Normanby [the British Ambassador], who told me that O'Connell in private life was obsequious and modest to the point of affectation." Or this:

"At the Tuileries [February 5] every one was talking about Guizot's fine speech on the subject of our misunderstanding with England."[1]

Or this: "July 6. Attended the Duc de Montpensier's fête in the Parc des Minimes. There were 4000 guests. Dancing and splendid illuminations. All the Princesses were there except the Duchesse d'Orléans. . . . This display of luxury and magnificence makes the populace very discontented: they grumble because they cannot have the same things. . . ." And so on.

But although in these last years of Louis-Philippe's reign Hugo's leaning towards Republicanism as a form of government seems entirely in abeyance, it is evident that his ideas were gradually becoming more and more those of advanced Liberalism. Not only was he a strenuous advocate of freedom in Europe, but in the affairs of France he was already inclined to attach more importance to social than to political questions. Universal education was a reform very necessary in his eyes: the condition of the poor was engaging his attention and sympathy—he had even planned and begun *Les Misérables;* and his particular hobby was of course the abolition of capital punishment together with a more lenient treatment of crime in general. In those judicial matters which came before the Peers we find him—wisely or not—always giving his voice and vote on the side of mercy. Thus in the case of two men guilty of attempts on the King's life, he voted in the one case for temporary imprisonment instead of a life

[1] *Re* the Spanish marriages.

sentence, in the other for life imprisonment instead of death. Thus again, in the sentence passed on Teste and Cubières—Peers and ex-Ministers—found guilty of peculation and embezzlement, he considered that degradation was a sufficient punishment instead of the heavy fine and the three years' imprisonment to which the former was condemned. And in the sensational trial of the Duc de Praslin for the murder of his wife (1847), Hugo would doubtless have voted for lenient treatment had not the criminal anticipated sentence by suicide. Such, in addition to his six set speeches on political questions—the last of which (January 1848) reflected the eager but short-lived hopes inspired in all Liberals by the accession of Pius IX. to the Papacy—is the poet's record as a Peer of France. A creditable record and quite calculated to warrant his expectation of a portfolio.

But all calculations, whether political or literary—for *Les Misérables* was already begun, and the greater part of *Les Contemplations* had been written—were rudely upset by the catastrophe of February 24, 1848. That "revolution of contempt"—as Lamartine called it—was so unnecessary that no one could have foreseen it. True, there was the small minority of sincere Republicans; there was the general demand for a wider franchise; there was the lower class, sick of the sleek, monopolising *bourgeois*, and largely infected with Socialist ideas. These elements of unrest, however, might have been neutralised by resolute government: Louis-Philippe had only to "sit tight." But the old King, weary of political worries, unnerved, and terribly shaken by the recent death of his beloved sister and confidante Mme. Adélaïde, had no heart to grapple with a crisis. Feebly, prematurely, he abdicated and slunk away from the Tuileries in a hackney cab, trusting that by making himself a scapegoat he might preserve the crown for his family.

So, doubtless, it would have been had the decision

rested with the authorised representatives of the nation; for the Deputies—Left as well as Right—were mostly willing to accept the infant Comte de Paris as King under the Regency of his mother the Duchesse d'Orléans. It happened, however, that the question was not left to the Deputies. The mob, taking matters—as usual—into its own unwashed hands, drove out the legislators and installed a Provisional Government until the country should have been consulted. Hugo, when he heard what was going on, hastened to the Place de la Bastille and harangued the assembled crowd in favour of the Regency. Herein he acted as became both his duty and his interest. Unfortunately he had—to use the consecrated phrase—"put his money on the wrong horse." For while he was talking in the Place de la Bastille, the other great poet of France had been talking more effectively to the invaders of the Palais Bourbon, and had initiated the second French Republic in which he himself was to hold for a while the leading place.

History presents few incidents more remarkable than the meteoric career of Lamartine in politics—his few months of popularity and power, his sudden and complete obliteration. For the moment, however, he seized the opportunity of putting in practice those Republican principles in which—as his *Histoire des Girondins* showed—he was now a convinced believer. From a simple Deputy chance had raised him to the leadership of the French nation: the same chance, by abolishing the Chamber of Peers, had reduced his brother poet to the insignificance of private life. To Hugo, though approving in general of Lamartine's policy,[1] this must have seemed a strange inversion of their proper positions. For him the Republic had come too soon, and things had arranged themselves

[1] He writes to Lamartine: "You are doing great things. The abolition of the death-penalty is a sublime fact. . . . You are a great man; I admire you and I love you."

without his intervention—or rather, contrary to his wishes: it was very annoying. Still his confidence in himself remained unshaken, and he was prepared to move with the times. His attitude towards the new state of affairs is somewhat that of the "great man" entrenched in his dignity. He will not offer himself for the Constituent Assembly, but of course, if elected, he will be ready to serve. "I belong to my country; I am at her disposal"—such is the substance of his first electoral address: in a later one he speaks of "a vigorous hatred of anarchy, a profound and tender love of the people," as his guiding principles. He holds also that "political questions ought to be subordinated to social reforms." Originally nominated for one of the Paris divisions, he was not among the elected; but when, after the first meeting of the Assembly (May 4), there remained many places to be filled in consequence of resignations or duplicate elections, he came forward again for the Department of the Seine, and was returned at the same time as Thiers, Changarnier, and—Louis Bonaparte.

As a Moderate or Conservative supporter of what would certainly be a Republican government, Hugo took his seat in the National Assembly on June 13. Very different here were his surroundings from the sedate and peaceful atmosphere of the House of Peers—different and far less suitable. His warmest admirers would not assert that either now, or afterwards in the Legislative Assembly, he was a success. Granting all his powers of invective and satire, his magnificent periods, his luxuriance of image and metaphor—granting that his words aroused frantic applause on one side and furious clamour on the other—the fact remains that he was not a great parliamentarian. For one thing, he was handicapped by the superior manner—the "I am Sir Oracle" tone—which a Chamber of Deputies resents as much as does our own House of Commons. A more serious deficiency was a lack of

that give-and-take faculty so indispensable for one who would ride the storms of a popular Assembly. No one could deal harder blows than he, but when his opponents hit back his manifest annoyance showed his own skin not nearly so thick as he assumed that of others to be. The discovery of this weakness added largely, of course, to the zest of his adversaries on the Right when he had deserted that side, so that Hugo-baiting came to be a recognised amusement. On one occasion, when some especially bold or fanciful figure of speech had aroused irreverent laughter, the orator stopped dramatically, and turning to the quarter whence the jeers came, he exclaimed : " You laugh at that, do you ? Very well, it shall be known throughout France that you have laughed." Needless to say, this petulant outburst provoked still more hilarity ; and when Hugo, turning to the shorthand reporter of the *Moniteur*, said solemnly, " *Greffier*, I beg you to note the names of those gentlemen who have laughed," then indeed the House gave itself up to loud and prolonged merriment. The incident may serve to illustrate how far the poet was from possessing the tact and sense of humour necessary to salvation in the rough-and-tumble of contentious debate. But in fact he had not the qualities of a debater. He seldom intervened *impromptu :* his speeches were carefully prepared and learned by heart—even if they were not in some cases actually read. Consequently he was ill able to endure interruptions which cut the thread of his premeditated oratory. And doubtless the ultimate explanation of his failure to be really effective in politics may be found in the remark made years later by Jules Simon : " Everything he said from the tribune might have been put into verse. In an ideal world that would have been charming ; with things as they are, lyricism and legislation do not go well together."

These reservations made, it must be admitted that Hugo's speeches read uncommonly well ; though—as has

been indicated before—they have to be accepted with some caution. For these orations, as they appear in *Actes et Paroles,* were very carefully edited by the orator himself. Not only did he insert or omit, according to fancy, the usual marks of approval or the reverse (*Applause —Sensation—Cries of dissent—Shouts of "Go on"—Profound sensation,* &c. &c.); not only did he disregard —if they occurred inconveniently—the remarks, pertinent or impertinent, interposed by his audience, but there is evidence that, with a licence more than poetic, he frequently modified his words by addition or suppression in such a way as to give a quite different meaning to the sentence. An example of this trickery may be found in the very first speech he delivered in the Constituent Assembly (June 20, 1848). The National Workshops—that hasty and ill-considered concession to Socialism —had already become a national nuisance, and the necessity for their abolition was recognised by the majority of the Assembly. The only question was how to manage this with as little discontent and hardship as possible, on which subject Hugo was among those who counselled gradual and moderate action. He had at this time no sort of sympathy with the followers of Louis Blanc, in the course of arguing against whom he said (as reported in the *Moniteur*): "It is to the Socialists that I am speaking." Twenty-seven years later, when publishing *Actes et Paroles,* being now himself a Radical, a Socialist, and what not, he altered the words of 1848 into: "*As a Socialist myself,* it is to the *impatient* Socialists that I am speaking." A distinction not without a difference.

But of Hugo's political acts and words we must be content—it is all that space will allow—to note just those few which will suffice for a fair appreciation of his conduct. In the speech above referred to he had strongly condemned the State patronage of pauperism. "We are already familiar," he said, "with the idler of opulence; you have created the idler of poverty—a

hundred times more dangerous to himself and to others. The Monarchy had its unemployed, the Republic will have its unemployable."

Immediately afterwards, the populace, resenting the first steps taken by the Government to get rid of the *désœuvrés*, broke out into insurrection: then followed the "Four Days" of June (23–26), the barricades, the bloodshed, the state of siege, the dictatorship of Cavaignac. At this crisis we find Hugo active in helping the Government. With other Deputies of the Right he goes round the barricades and appeals to the rioters, reassuring the timid and trying to pacify the disorderly: as Vice-President of a Committee of Inquiry he visits the forts and prisons in which arrested insurgents were confined and occupies himself with measures for the relief of their destitute families: in a word, he associates himself fully and honourably with the party of Law and Order. Moreover, he supported by his vote, both in 1848 and in 1849, the maintenance of the "state of siege," and advocated the giving of pensions to the families of those officers who had fallen in putting down the rioters. In all this he was doing good work: there was nothing to be ashamed of. Yet so terribly anxious was the Hugo of 1875 to disavow the Hugo of 1848 that he speaks of himself as having, after the Four Days, "parted company with the victorious party," because of his disgust at the way they misused their triumph—"military violence, transportations without trial, a sham Republic with its martial law and its state of siege." On this last point he is most emphatic: "So long as the state of siege lasted, at whatever period, M. Victor Hugo deemed it his duty to oppose it, whatever form it took." In making this bold assertion he must either have forgotten the facts, or—more probably—have supposed that his readers would not take the trouble to turn up the official records of the voting. Even in his speech of September 2, 1848, which is published in *Actes et Paroles*, it is only indirectly that he

can be considered as opposing the state of siege. He is there protesting against the suppression of certain newspapers, and what he says in effect is: "Let the state of siege continue, but it ought not to involve any such harsh and unjust measure as this. . . . Do not tell me that this course is necessary: necessity is the invariable plea of a bad policy."

On two other subjects, of a non-party character, we may welcome his consistency. In the discussion (September 15) on that article of the Constitution which abolished the death penalty for political offences he was among the minority who advocated its abolition pure and simple. "There are three things," he said, "which belong to God and not to man—the irrevocable, the irreparable, the indissoluble. Woe to man if he introduce these into his laws!"

Again, on "The liberty of the Theatre" (April 3, 1849), he urged his invariable views against the Censorship. His main argument was that that institution defeated its own object by enlisting public sympathy on the other side; and he ended with these words: "By liberty, you place theatrical licence and excess under the censorship of the public; with an official censorship you place those same qualities under popular patronage."

But Hugo, besides his Assembly speeches—which after all were not very numerous—desired to have, in his character of a public man, a special organ for the expression of his opinions—a journal inspired by himself. He was no longer living now in the Place Royale: the June rioters had invaded that peaceful spot and compelled Mme. Hugo and her children to leave what had been their home for seventeen years. Temporarily—pending their move into the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne—they were housed in 5 Rue d'Isly, and it is from there that Mme. Hugo writes (July 26) to Victor Pavie, partly to tell him her new address and how much she regretted the change, partly to let him know of her husband's

forthcoming newspaper and to ask him to promote its circulation in Angers. The first number of *L'Evénement*—so it was called—appeared on July 31. Its name was explained as indicating what was at that time a new departure in journalism. For, while the practice of all papers was to devote their most prominent space to political news—whether that news was important or not—the *Evénement* would always give the most conspicuous place to *the event* of the day—whether political, social, artistic, or literary. The policy of the paper was to be Hugo's policy; and though the poet was careful to disclaim any part in the editing of the *Evénement*,[1] the fact that its inner staff consisted of his two sons, Charles and François-Victor, together with Auguste Vacquerie and Paul Meurice, made it clear to every one that nothing which the Master disapproved would be admitted—a conclusion amply justified by the history of the paper. And as the Master was at this time by his own confession only a Liberal—a Liberal opportunist we might say—and not until 1849 a Republican, the tone of his journal was hostile even to moderate Republicans and vehemently bitter against all the extremes of the Left. It said some very nasty things against Hugo's old friend Lamennais, it was sarcastic about Armand Barbès, whom Hugo afterwards hailed as "a great soul and the martyr of progress," it congratulated Mlle. Rachel on having declined, after her performance of *Phèdre*, to sing the *Marseillaise*—"that song of massacre and blood."

Meanwhile the representatives proceed slowly with their work of constitution-making. By September 27 they had reached the problem of whether there should be one Legislative Assembly or two, and Hugo is among the minority who vote for two. An even more vital

[1] Among the contributors to *L'Evénement* were any number of distinguished people—Théophile Gautier, Alphonse Karr, Gérard de Nerval, Méry, Léon Gozlan, De Banville, Dumas *fils*, Charles Monselet, Henri Mürger—to name only a few.

question is (October 7)—Shall the President be elected by the Assembly or by the nation ? On this point Hugo is with the majority who vote for the latter course. And when at last the Constitution as a whole is passed (November 4)—not indeed with much faith or satisfaction—by a large majority, Hugo is among the few who vote against it. He disliked it on many grounds but especially because the institution of a single omnipotent Legislative Assembly seemed to him "a germ of calamities and fraught with danger to the peace and prosperity of a country." The thing, however, having been—for better or worse—done, the next step was to choose a President. And here the *Evénement* distinguished itself by the vigour—nay, the frenzied enthusiasm—with which it advocated the candidature of Louis Napoléon, while doing everything to disparage the claims of the other most likely candidate—the honest if somewhat stolid General Cavaignac. Had the nomination remained with the Assembly it is morally certain that either Cavaignac or Lamartine would have been chosen ; as it was, by one of those incalculable freaks peculiar to universal suffrage, on December 10 the country went solid for the magic name which by his writings in the last twenty years Hugo had contributed—almost as much as Thiers and Béranger—to make the object of a blind idolatry. Assuredly the new President had good cause to feel grateful to one who was both the poet of the Imperial legend and the inspirer of the *Evénement ;* nor is it doubtful that Louis Napoléon would gladly have included Hugo in his first Cabinet—as Minister of Education, it was commonly said—had it not been for the unwillingness of certain other necessary men to serve with a colleague whom they regarded as dictatorial and cranky. Still, Cabinets do not last for ever ; and if not in this, perhaps in the next . . . There was no reason as yet why the poet should either suspect the President's ulterior designs or cease to act with that "party of order" to which the President's

own inclination would probably lie. And so during the remaining lifetime of the Constituent Assembly Hugo continues to vote with the Right—even to the extent of opposing an amnesty for those who had been transported in connection with the June riots ; and he is more than once in heated conflict with advanced Republicans like Ledru-Rollin, Jules Favre, and Jules Grévy.

The main object of the latter party was to prolong as much as possible the duration of the existing Assembly, since they feared with good reason that in its successor the Republican element would be far weaker ; the opposite side, with whom was Hugo—comprising the clerical and other anti-republican interests—urged that the Constituent had now finished the business for which it had been elected, and that it should dissolve itself to make way for the Legislative Assembly created by the Constitution. After long debates the elections were fixed for May 13, and their result showed how much moderate Republicanism had suffered by its dalliance with Socialism. Only some sixty members of that party were returned, so that the real opposition was now in the hands of the extreme Democrats, who proudly revived the ominous title of "The Mountain." Lamartine and other notable members of the Constituent failed to obtain seats. On the other side was a large and miscellaneous majority calling itself the "party of order," and containing—besides Legitimists, Orleanists, Bonapartists—a number of neutrals who tolerated the Republic without any affection for it. Among these Hugo must be placed. A few weeks before the elections he had written this oracular letter to a friend : "We may sink or we may get to shore : I believe in two possibilities—a horrible shipwreck or a splendid haven. May God lead us, but let us help God ! "

It is not clear from this what he considered to be the "shipwreck" and what the "haven." But the real

key to his sentiments may no doubt be found in a little note, happily preserved, of Mme. Hugo's. "I believe," she wrote, "that the country will stand the Republic so long as it is not in the hands of the Republicans."

A Republic without Republicans — that is the ideal!

CHAPTER XII

1849–1851

Hugo's position in 1849 : His own account of his change to Radicalism : Another version of the same affair : First breach with the Conservatives : Speech on the Roman question : Hugo goes over to "the Mountain" : "Conversion" or "apostasy"? : Why he failed as a leader : Speeches and incidents in the Assembly : Hugo and Montalembert : Oration at the funeral of Balzac : An appeal to the jury : Speech on Revision of the Constitution

So far the public career of Victor Hugo has been nothing if not conventional and moderate : now, by what seems a sudden transformation, it becomes abnormal and extreme. Biographically speaking, the change need not be regretted ; for moderate men are apt to be uninteresting. But if hitherto the poet-prophet has exercised his *rôle* in an area so circumscribed as to justify the assertion that his words were merely the adornment and emphasis of average opinion, henceforth —sojourning, so to speak, in the wilderness—he gives a character and distinction of his own.

At the period we have reached he had, it appears, before him the three proverbial courses. One way was to continue along the safe middle path of opportunism and cautious counsels ; a second, to turn to the Right and join himself to the Reactionaries—the upholders of vested interests and abuses, political and clerical. The third road went Leftwards and began a journey which led no one knew whither—to Utopia, or to chaos. This was the road that Hugo took. It would be convenient and symmetrical if we could make the parting of the ways coincide with the beginning

of the new Legislative Assembly (May 28, 1849); and such, according to Hugo's own account, would be the case. Here is what he says (speaking of himself in the third person):[1]

"After June 1848, he was waiting—his mind was not made up; but after June 1849 he waited no longer. The significance of events flashed upon his soul, and when a flash remains, it is the light of truth that has burst upon the conscience. In 1849 this clear illumination came. When he saw Rome trodden down in the name of France, when—after June 13—he saw the triumph of coalitions hostile to progress and marked their cynical joy, then indeed he was grieved—he understood; and at the moment when the conquerors were stretching out their hands to entice him into their ranks, he felt in the depths of his heart that he was one of the conquered. A dead creature lay on the ground, and they cried 'It is the Republic!' He went up to that dead creature and recognised that it was Freedom. Then he bent over the corpse and espoused it. Before him he saw downfall, defeat, ruin, insult, proscription—and he said, 'It is well.' . . . From that day, the Republic and Freedom were identified in his convictions. From that day, without truce or respite, almost without pausing to take breath, steadily, obstinately, inch by inch, he struggled on behalf of those two great things so misunderstood and so calumniated. Such is the history of what has been called his 'apostasy.'"

A choice of Heracles, one would say, preferring the path of toil and danger to that of ease and security; or else shall we adopt Hugo's own comparison when he says: "Every man, if he is sincere, may tread again for himself the road to Damascus—a journey which must vary for each individual soul"?

But stripped of all highfalutin, this passage contains two statements—that Hugo's change was dictated

[1] *Actes et Paroles*, vol. i., Introduction.

by his conscience, and that the occasion of it was the intervention of France in Roman affairs and the events of June 13. The first of these two propositions is beyond the range of precise proof, the second is amenable to the test of facts. The specified date, June 13, was the day of the attempt made by Ledru-Rollin and the Democrats to create a popular insurrection as a protest against the action of the Government in sending to Rome an expeditionary force under Oudinot to restore Papal authority. This step was only one in a series of events throughout which Hugo had supported the policy of the Ministry, as he continued to do in those repressive measures which the tumult of June 13 rendered necessary. And it was not, in fact, until his speech of October 19—when the Pontiff had now been restored and the Roman Republic destroyed—that he appeared on the Anti-Papal side, condemning the illusory concessions to freedom made by the Commission of Cardinals. In taking this line Hugo was, of course, in opposition to his old party; so that he would appear, in the elaborate account we have quoted, to have ante-dated by some four months the event which he calls his "conversion."

The exact date would not matter much except for the very precise inexactitude with which the subject is treated in *Actes et Paroles*. The truth seems to be that, though Hugo continued for some time after June 13 to act with the "party of order," his relations to it were fast becoming strained. One incident illustrates this very clearly—a misunderstanding, if not an actual quarrel, between the poet and his political associates, caused by his speech of July 9 (published in *Actes et Paroles* under the title of *La Misère*). It was a question, at that time, of a Bill which should carry out the recommendations of a Committee appointed some months previously to inquire into and report upon certain measures of social reform—the better housing of the poor, the encouragement of thrift, the regulation

of child labour in factories, and the like. It was, strictly speaking, a non-party measure, since all were agreed on the desirability of these reforms, and details alone were in dispute. But Hugo, instead of applying himself to these points, took the occasion to launch out into an eloquent, though largely irrelevant, oration on poverty in general and the mistake of supposing—as so many supposed—that its evils could only be met either by ruthless repression or by wild Socialism, whereas the true course was one of prudent remedial legislation based on the principles of the Gospel.

"I am not," said he, "one of those who imagine that you can abolish suffering in this world: suffering is a divine law. But I do firmly believe and declare that you can abolish poverty." And much more in the same strain. It was all very fine, but it had nothing to do with the matter in hand. Impatient interruptions from his own side disconcerted the orator. "We are all agreed on that point," shouted out one. "You are refuting arguments which no one has advanced," exclaimed another. "The recommendations of the Committee have been unanimously supported by the majority of this Assembly," cried a third. More than once the President intervened, warning the speaker that he had no right to attribute in general terms to a portion of the House certain views which every one repudiated. And then as the speech proceeded, the angry protests of the Right were renewed. "Who ever said such a thing?" they exclaimed. "Name! Name!" But Hugo could give no names. Perhaps, indeed, he may have imagined, rightly or wrongly, that his colleagues were lukewarm and sceptical; or, it may be, his carefully prepared discourse was based on the familiar device of rhetoric which sets up an imaginary objector for the pleasure of knocking him down. In any case his speech, cheered at many points by the Left, irritated his own party by its irrelevance and still more by the underlying implication that they were less zealous than

he in the cause of philanthropy. The effect produced, though doubtless unintentional, was very real, and from that day—according to the best authorities [1]—dated the irrevocable rupture between Hugo and the Conservatives. To make the severance complete, it needed only his speech of October 19, on the Roman question. But before we come to this speech an event has to be recorded which, as some declare, mainly influenced the poet's strong and unexpected attitude on that question.

The Assembly was prorogued from August 12 to October 1, and the recess was destined to produce a political sensation which staggered all the respectable diplomats of Europe. This was the publication in the *Moniteur* of Louis Bonaparte's letter to his aide-de-camp, Colonel Edgar Ney, in Rome; in which letter the President, with delightful frankness, recommended the Papal Government to set its house in order. "If France had intervened to restore the Pope, she had not done so with the intention of restoring the old absolutism. Let Pius IX. grant a general amnesty, let him introduce the Code Napoléon, let him inaugurate a Liberal and non-priestly administration." Never had His Holiness been rated so plainly or so rudely. It was an indiscretion of course—perhaps the most creditable thing that Louis Bonaparte ever did, but still a blazing indiscretion. For the publication of the letter divested it of any private or unofficial character, while at the same time the President was not voicing French official and Parliamentary opinion; which was quite content—now that the danger of Austrian interference was averted—to let Roman affairs rest and accept the flagrant fraud of the *motu proprio* declaration as a sufficient concession to liberty. The point, however, as it affects our story, is that the President was for the time at variance with the majority

[1] Notably that of M. de Melun himself, the author of the proposals under discussion, whose evidence is quoted by M. Biré.

of the Assembly. Hugo, too, as we have seen, was on bad terms with the party to which he still nominally belonged, and he had realised that the Right would never accept him as a leader. What more natural, therefore, than that he should seize the opportunity to espouse the President's views on the Roman question and make himself their mouthpiece in the Assembly? Surely in this way he would earn the gratitude of the Head of the State, and in the change of Ministry which was imminent his claims would be irresistible. Hence, in his speech of October 19, following and eulogising the tone of the President's letter, he urged the Pope to dismiss his bad advisers and identify himself with the people. But this speech, while it finally severed Hugo from his party, was singularly unsuccessful as a bid for office. Ten days later the Cabinet of Odilon Barrot was replaced by that of Rouher and Fould, in which—much to his disgust—the poet was offered no place. Having now quarrelled with the Right, and having no longer any hopes from the favour of the President, it only remained for him to go over to the Left: there, at any rate, he might reach pre-eminence, and ultimately perhaps attain the highest position in the State.

In one way the moment of his change was propitious. The Left just now were badly in want of a leader: their champion, Ledru-Rollin, had been obliged, in consequence of the insurrection of June 13, to quit France; and they had among them, with the exception of Jules Favre, no conspicuous orator. In that direction, then, there was an opening; whereas on the side which Hugo was leaving there were several —Montalembert, Berryer, Thiers, for example—for whom in debate he was no match. So Hugo went to "the Mountain"—to the Radicals and Socialists who were glad enough to utilise and applaud his power of invective, without, however, at any time completely trusting their new ally or forgetting his past history.

Such, from one point of view, is the true and faithful account of a great "apostasy." It is all delightfully clear. Unappreciated by his own party, Hugo makes overtures to the President: slighted here, he joins the Opposition and becomes the most advanced of Republicans. It is just a matter of personal *pique* and personal ambition. If men's conduct could be explained by motives so charmingly simple, the science of it might be learned in the nursery. Unfortunately, outside the necessities of political partisanship, there is no such curt and easy way of judging people; and while we assign full weight to the effects of Hugo's wonderful feelings—he was very sensitive and very vindictive—we are bound by all the laws of human nature to recognise as at least probable that he was influenced also by some genuine, if illusory, ideas of Justice and Right, and that the step he now took—though precipitated by events—was one which somehow or other he was ultimately sure to take. We know, for one thing, that long before this change of party his thoughts had been engrossed by the sufferings of the poor: let us remember that the first two books of *Les Misérables* were written before 1848, and that his speech on *La Misère* was only an echo of the same sentiments—a speech untimely and tactless in its political context, but clearly that of an idealist who desired, as he had said before, to raise politics from a mere game of parties into the wider sphere of national and cosmopolitan philanthropy. With these sentiments it is not surprising that he was attracted to the Left side of the Assembly, as the one where he would find most sympathy. His attitude on the Roman question is still easier to understand. He had supported his party and the Ministry so long as there was a hope, encouraged by the Pope himself, that French intervention would result in the establishment at Rome of a national instead of a sectarian government: when it became clear that this was not to be, and that the Roman

expedition was regarded by the majority of the Assembly merely as a political move intended to check Austria, it was natural and even logical that Hugo should dissociate himself from a policy which was either futile or hypocritical, and that his tone and language about Pius IX. should henceforth be the reverse of complimentary.

That Louis Bonaparte was personally of the same opinion we have seen, but it would be unfair to describe the praise bestowed by the poet upon the President—either in the Assembly or in the *Evénement*—as simple flattery employed for the sake of securing office. Only a very superficial or prejudiced student of Hugo could conclude that his nature was of the ingratiating sort: the right word to denote his attitude is not "flattery" but "patronage." Perhaps Louis Bonaparte did not want to be patronised: more probably his reason for not inviting Hugo into the Ministry was that, in dismissing Odilon Barrot and his colleagues, he desired to find more pliable instruments, and pliability he did not judge to be one of Hugo's attributes—herein paying indirectly a compliment to the poet's character. For it is certain that Hugo, before this date and before calling himself a Republican, had shown himself in love with the two great Republican watchwords of Liberty and Fraternity. His sentiments on the Italian question illustrate the first; and for the second we may refer to that meeting of benevolent gentlemen which, under the name of the "Peace Congress," was held in Paris in the summer of 1849. Of this Congress Victor Hugo was President and our Mr. Cobden Vice-President; and the key-note of the President's opening speech (August 21) was, "We nations ought to love one another," while in his closing speech—after three days' interchange of the usual amiabilities—the cause of Fraternity was so eloquently advocated that the wolf and the lamb lay down together; in other words, two of those present, a Catholic Abbé and a Protestant

Pastor, fell into each other's arms in an embrace of brotherly love. Such incidents suggest that if Hugo—possessed by visions of Peace, Liberty, and Brotherhood, and believing that Republicanism was most likely to realise these visions—should desire office and should even aspire to become President of a Republic which should set an example to the world, there was nothing unnatural in that. Every man of talent and ambition does assuredly in some form or other whisper to himself those famous words of the elder Pitt: "I know that I can save this country and that no one else can"—he may be right or he may be wrong, he may get the chance or not, but he thinks it all the same. So with the poet. Nor were his hopes inordinate or baseless. He had seen what wonderful things the great People with its universal suffrage might do: he had seen Lamartine for a while practically, though not in name, Head of the State; and if Lamartine, why not Hugo?

Such is the other side of the question; such are the considerations that force themselves upon us as correcting or supplementing the theory which attributes Hugo's change merely to self-love and self-interest. We may smile at his own lyrical exaggeration, the "road to Damascus," and all the rest of it: his conversion was not so sudden or so sublime as he would have us fancy—let us say, as he himself fancied (for Hugo was the one person always persuaded by Hugo's oratory); but to describe it as a base apostasy is an even greater absurdity in the other direction.

Resume now in outline the career of our Radical and Republican. His speech on Rome had been received with cheers from the Left, who, in their sympathy with Mazzini, had been from the first bitterly opposed to the Papal restoration. As he stepped down from the tribune, up rose Montalembert, chief of the so-called Liberal-Catholics, for the most part more Catholic than Liberal—Montalembert, once Hugo's friend and ally, now and henceforth his most ruthless

adversary. "Gentlemen," he began in his easy and polished style, "the speech you have just listened to has already received the chastisement it deserved in the applause that has greeted it." And then, when the delighted cheers of the majority and the furious cries of "the Mountain" had for a moment subsided, he resumed: "If the word *chastisement* offends you, I will withdraw it and substitute the word *recompense*. . . . I say, then, that the speaker has received as his recompense the applause of the Extreme Opposition, but that the majority, to which he has belonged until to-day, and the moderate electors of Paris who returned him to represent the party of order (*interruption*) . . . that these electors, I repeat, will be entitled to ask whether it was to gain this sort of applause that they sent him to this House."

It was a declaration of war, and as such Hugo accepted it. His reply on the following day, though rather belated, was spirited enough.

"M. de Montalembert," he said, "has declared that the applause of one portion of this Assembly was my chastisement. Well, I accept that chastisement and I am proud of it. There are other plaudits which I will leave to those who care to accept them—the plaudits which come from the butchers of Hungary and from the oppressors of Italy."

There is no trace here of compromise or conciliation. In going over to the other side of the Assembly Hugo went right over: he did not tarry even for a while among the small group of Moderate Republicans in "the Plain," but ascended straightway to the seats of "the Mountain," where he found himself associated with extremists like Félix Pyat, Théodore Bac, Michel de Bourges, &c.—men far more advanced than he was at this time in socialistic and revolutionary ideas—men whose violence was destined to give a fatal plausibility to that cry of "Society in danger" which ultimately served as the pretext of the *coup d'état*. It is

doubtful whether these people would have been amenable to any leader; it is certain that Hugo was not the man for the part. He spoke seldom and at long intervals: he had a habit, after delivering his speech, of leaving the House without waiting to hear or answer adverse criticisms, and this habit naturally laid him open to the taunt of cowardice. It was, at any rate, a confession of weakness. For the poet—as we have said before—was unready in debate: his *impromptus* were few and feeble: with the small arms necessary for retort and repartee he was ill equipped, and the heavy guns of his oratory required time to get into position and to discharge. Fine phrases, striking metaphors, stinging invective—these abounded in his speeches, but they all smelt of the lamp, a fact which his opponents were quick to perceive and make fun of. And while Hugo's language knew no measure in its virulence, the knowledge that this quality was the result not of a sudden outburst of feeling but of careful and artificial preparation increased the resentment of those who regarded him as a deserter and renegade. Hence, not a speech of his but was the occasion of anger and ill-feeling, not one which did not widen the breach between him and his former friends.

On January 15, 1850, he took the opportunity of a debate on the Education Bill to deliver against clerical influence and Jesuitical control a bitter philippic in which he did not hesitate to describe his opponents as "the parasites of the Church . . . not believers, but sectarian agents of a religion which you do not understand, paraders of sanctity as a stage-effect . . . men whose ideal is to darken intelligence by the shadow of the cassock and to checkmate genius by the figure of the beadle."

Three months later Hugo spoke warmly against the imprisonment in fortresses of political offenders: their transportation to places like Cayenne and Lambessa was a sufficient punishment, and to aggravate it by

confinement was practically, he argued, to re-establish the death-penalty. "The law," he said, "is an unjust one, and when men put injustice into a law God puts His justice, and with that law He strikes those who have made it. . . . For my part, I shall never hesitate in following the virgin Conscience rather than the prostitute that is called Political Expediency. . . ." A fine speech as we read it, but one which was somewhat marred in delivery by those interruptions before which Hugo was so helpless. Let us quote one typical and amusing example. In the course of his remarks he observed that, if the present law had existed in 1848, and if that resolution had failed, the Government of Louis-Philippe might have transported no less a person than M. Odilon Barrot. The latter at once rose to correct the speaker by a personal explanation: "I have never been a conspirator," said he. "I have always supported the constitution of my country, and I do not imagine that there is any Government—even one formed of your friends and associates—which would punish adherence to the laws as a crime."

Upset by this unforeseen protest, and at a loss how to deal with it, Hugo comes to an awkward pause, looks round helplessly from Left to Right, evidently groping painfully for a reply. "Why don't you answer him?" shouted out a voice. "Ah! you weren't prepared for that!" cried another. And poor Hugo in desperation at last manages to evolve this marvellous rejoinder: "The Honourable M. Odilon Barrot—whose high character no one respects more than I do—has misunderstood my meaning. When I spoke of the possibility that justice might have attacked him, I was not speaking of *just justice* but of *unjust justice*—the justice of parties. Now *unjust justice* often strikes the *just* man, and might therefore strike M. Odilon Barrot." (*Loud and prolonged laughter, at the end of which the orator resumes his speech.*)

Another important debate was that beginning on

May 20, on the proposal for limiting the franchise, and resulting in the law of May 31, passed by an Assembly which sought to diminish the danger of Socialism by restrictions on the universal suffrage which had existed since 1848. In this debate—rendered memorable by Thiers' never-forgotten and never-forgiven reference to *la vile multitude*—Hugo, of course, was among the minority who opposed any change in the present system, regarding it as a safety-valve for discontent and a safeguard against violence. "The right of insurrection," said he, "has been taken away by the right of universal suffrage." For those who feared to trust the people he expressed his contempt in one of those amazing metaphors which could not fail to provoke the derision of the irreverent, when he spoke of "your puny little laws defying the democracy and digging their wretched little nails into the granite of universal suffrage!"

Annoyed at the laughter, the orator protested against what he called "systematic and calculated interruptions."

"We are only laughing," they shouted, "but that no doubt upsets the harangue you have learnt by heart."

"The object of these interruptions," continued Hugo, "is to disconcert the speaker's thoughts."

"His *memory*, you mean," these rude people cried out.

Resuming, Hugo attacked what was now his favourite *bête noire*, the iniquity of clerical, *i.e.* Jesuitical, influence, which he discerned in this and every other measure. It was especially for the benefit of Montalembert (who, as we gather from *L'Evénement*, "was laughing with that idiotic laugh in which he always indulges whenever he hears serious subjects being treated") that the speaker declared that this was "a law which would delight the heart of Loyola . . . a law which I will not say has been created by Tartufe, but which I am sure has been baptized by Escobar."

"The Mountain" were delighted and gave Hugo an organised ovation as he descended from the tribune. Next day (May 22) came Montalembert's turn to speak on the other side. Hugo unfortunately was absent from the House—a fact which drew the ironical comments of his adversary. "If M. Victor Hugo were here," he said, "I should recall to him the antecedents of his life—all the causes that he has sung, all the causes that he has flattered, all the causes that he has denied. (*Loud cheers from the Right.*) But he is not here. That is an old habit of his; just as he runs away from the service of lost causes, so he runs away from the reprisals that one is entitled to exercise on him." (*Bravo! Bravo!*)

To this personal attack Hugo made, on the following day, a reply which he had had ample time to prepare. The point of it was that, except for his early Bourbonism, there was nothing in his past career inconsistent with the opinions he now held. His rival replied at once, and a wordy contest followed, barren of any conclusive result beyond the exhibition of more or less dialectical skill—the "more" being, in this case, on the side of Montalembert, who had, besides, a stronger position to start from.

Six weeks later Hugo spoke in opposition to the proposed re-establishment of a stamp duty on newspapers, and after this plea for the fullest liberty of the Press, he seems during the next year to have made no speech—or none of any importance—in the Assembly. Two non-political orations, however, deserve notice, one of which was that delivered at the funeral of Balzac. The poet and the novelist had always been good friends—the dedication of *Illusions Perdues* shows that—though latterly Balzac was rather hurt, it is thought, at the lukewarmness of Hugo's efforts to get him into the Academy. But their gifts were wide enough apart to allow of a genuine admiration on each side; and, as it happened, the poet was one

of the last who saw his friend alive. In *Choses Vues* he relates how on the evening of August 17 news reached him of Balzac's critical condition. At once he hastened to 14 Rue Fortunée—that sumptuous mansion in which the author of *La Comédie Humaine*, thanks to a wealthy marriage, was enabled to end his days. "Passing through the marble hall and up the wide staircase, I entered the dying man's room. He lay there unconscious: on one side of the bed stood a nurse, on the other a manservant. As I caught the profile of his face, it seemed to me to resemble that of the Emperor; but its colour was purple—almost black. . . . I pressed his hand and said a last good-bye. When I got home I found several people awaiting me in my house. 'Gentlemen,' I said to them, 'Europe is about to lose one of her great intellects.' . . ."

At the graveside in Père-Lachaise, Hugo extolled the dead man's genius. It would have been too much, perhaps, to expect him to recognise in Balzac—what the world has at length recognised—the dominant literary influence of the nineteenth century; but he indicated admirably the immense equanimity of one who, as he said, "could disentangle himself serene and smiling from those grave and terrible studies which brought Molière to melancholy and Rousseau to misanthropy."

Besides the funeral oration on Balzac, one other speech of this period illustrates Hugo's style. At the Seine Assizes, on June 11, 1851, his son Charles was on trial for an article in *L'Evénement* violently attacking the Government as responsible for some brutal scenes which had attended the execution of a poacher called Montcharmont—a man who, by the way, had murdered two gendarmes and one gamekeeper. The article was regarded as an infringement of the respect due to the law, and a prosecution was ordered. Hugo, having obtained leave to speak in his son's defence, addressed to the jury an impassioned appeal against capital punishment. The law which authorises such a crime is,

argued he, a bad law, and therefore my son was justified in discrediting it by all means. "It is I," he said, "who am more guilty than he, for he is only adhering to the principles in which I have educated him. For myself, I have throughout my life fought against this iniquity, and I shall continue to fight—I swear it in presence of yonder great victim of the death-penalty who is watching us now and listening to us" (*with these words he pointed to the picture of Christ which hung on the wall at the farther end of the room*). In spite of this dramatic and sensational effort, the jury found Charles Hugo guilty, and he was sentenced to a fine of 500 francs and to six months' imprisonment.

We must return now to the Assembly and to the great question which lay before it in July 1851. Should the Constitution be revised so as to make possible the re-election of the President when his term of office should expire in the following May? Many deemed this measure desirable in the interests of order and security, others were largely influenced by the petitions for revision, got up by Bonapartist agents, which came flowing into the Assembly from all quarters of France. Hugo, of course, was opposed to such a course, for every reason. Privately, he had hopes that he himself might succeed to the headship of the State; personally, he disliked Louis Bonaparte, who had slighted and ignored him. Moreover, he distrusted the proposal to prolong the President's tenure of office as merely a scheme for converting Presidency into Empire. This view he did not hesitate to proclaim aloud in his speech of July 17. A long speech, for—with interruptions and explanations—it occupied four hours; a great speech, for in the fury of its declamation it might be compared to Demosthenes against Æschines or to Cicero against Catiline; but an unfortunate speech, none the less, and tactically a lamentable mistake. For Hugo here adopted more explicitly than before some articles of that Socialist programme which so alarmed the country—the "right

of work," the plebiscite on all great questions, the elective and temporary magistracy. He launched out into Utopian visions of a Republic which should remove all the grievances of humanity ("No more monarchism—no more pauperism!"), a Republic that should embrace all Europe—"the United States of Europe," as he said, coining a phrase which was received with mingled mirth and indignation.

"Really! Hugo is mad!" ejaculated Montalembert.

"Oh! these poets!" exclaimed another Deputy, throwing up his hands. As to M. Molé, he signified his disgust by walking solemnly out of the House; but as no one else followed him, he presently returned—which rather spoiled the effect of his protest.

Proceeding with the attack on the Ministry, Hugo spoke of "a Government which has trapped and garrotted all our liberties, one by one: nay, it is not a Government, it is one vast intrigue—history will perhaps call it one vast conspiracy."

The majority, who supported this Government, he characterised with bitter contempt as "men who, whenever they heard such words as 'democracy,' 'liberty,' 'progress,' 'humanity,' grovelled on the ground in abject terror, with their ears glued to the earth if haply they may catch the distant rumble of Russian guns approaching to their help." Such reactionaries were doing their best to "check and delay the advent of God"; as for himself and his friends, theirs was the cause "for which Socrates drank the hemlock and Jesus Christ died upon the cross."

More justifiable than this demagogic clap-trap was Hugo's denunciation of Louis Bonaparte. "What is the meaning," he asked, "of these bought cries of 'Vive l'Empereur!' that we are always hearing, and who pays for them? . . . A prolongation of powers means a perpetual Consulate, and that means Empire. . . . After Augustus, are we to have Augustulus—after Napoleon the Great, Napoleon the Little?"

From these specimens the stormy character of the speech may easily be judged. It abounded—even more than Hugo's oratory in general—in theatrical language and effects, at which, while the Left shouted delirious applause, the Right cried out scornfully, "Take all that to the Porte-Saint-Martin!" It was, also—as the President of the Assembly observed in calling the speaker to order—"not so much a discourse as a diatribe," composed, it seemed, for the express purpose of causing as much anger and ill-feeling as possible. But the worst of it was that it could do no conceivable good, and was the speech not of a statesman but of an incendiary. For this reckless waving of the red rag at such a moment served only to accentuate the dangers of a Socialistic Republic, thus playing directly into the hands of the Bonapartist plotters and preparing the way for "the saviour of Society." When the division was taken 446 voted in favour of revision, 278 against. To sanction any organic change, a three-fourths majority was required: therefore the proposal for revision was lost—a result foreseen at the Elysée and welcome there. The resources of knavery were now called into play: during the next four months, secretly and silently, the arrangements of the *coup d'état* were matured. Unwittingly Hugo had contributed to the success of the crime he was soon to denounce.

CHAPTER XIII

1851–1852

The *coup d'état* of December 2 : The Committee of Resistance : Heroism in a bus : The Faubourg Saint-Marceau and the Rue Popincourt : Hugo thinks of raising the Quartier Latin : *Petrified* soldiers : The night of December 3 : The Massacre of the Boulevards : 25,000 francs for Hugo alive or dead ! Statement of M. de Maupas : Hugo escapes to Brussels : Hardships of exile : Why the *Histoire d'un Crime* was not published for twenty-five years : *Napoléon le Petit* : Sale of Hugo's goods and chattels : Hugo leaves Brussels for Jersey : Reasons for his departure

It is good to get back from words to deeds, though into the deeds of December 2 and following days we have only to enter so far as they concern our hero. For which venerable phrase no apology is here needed since it is as a truly heroic figure that Hugo describes himself to us at this crisis. We have only to turn to his own account of the matter written while the events were still fresh in his memory and his notebook, and fortified—he tells us—by testimony gathered from his fellow-refugees. It is a thrilling tale—that of the *Histoire d'un Crime,* as even a brief abstract will show.

Scene 1. It is early morning of December 2, when two Deputies call on Hugo with the news. "It has come," say they ; "the *coup d'état* is accomplished." And he learns how Thiers, Changarnier, and seventy other leading citizens and soldiers have been seized and lodged in Mazas prison. They tell him too that some Republican Deputies are about to meet and consult at a certain house in the Rue Blanche. Hugo, of course, will join them. But first he rushes into his wife's room to tell her what has happened and places on

her bed a box containing 900 francs—the amount that remains in the house after he has taken 500 for himself.

"What are you going to do?" asks Mme. Hugo.

"My duty," replied Victor.

"Do it," she says, and embraces him.

Scene 2. At 70 Rue Blanche. Several Deputies are already there when Hugo arrives. "What is to be done?" says Michel de Bourges. "*Everything*," replies our hero grandly. So they start by forming a Committee of Resistance, consisting of six members; which at first they think of calling a "Committee of Insurrection," but Hugo advises the other name, for—says he—it is Louis Bonaparte and his friends who are the insurgents, not we. Then comes the question—Shall an immediate call to arms be made? Yes, says Victor; No, say the majority, in favour of a waiting policy.

Scene 3. Afternoon of December 2. Hugo, reproaching himself for delay, sallies out—accompanied by Arnaud de l'Ariège and two others—to see what can be done. Everything seems quiet and normal: a certain number of troops and police are about—that is all. The peaceful everyday buses are running as usual; and taking one of these, the "resisters" proceed from the Place de la Bastille toward the Madeleine. Now let Hugo speak for himself: "As the omnibus, which was full, approached the more central parts, the crowd in the streets grew thicker. Reaching the Boulevard Saint-Martin, we perceived a regiment of cuirassiers coming towards us, and in a few moments they were alongside of us. . . . Suddenly the troops halted, and the traffic came to a standstill. Then the soldiers were close to us: from my place in the omnibus I could almost touch them. Unable to restrain myself any longer, I lowered the window and put my head out. Sternly and steadily I looked at that line of soldiers facing me, and I cried, 'Down with Louis Bonaparte! Those who serve traitors are traitors!' Arnaud

had also lowered his window and was leaning half-way out, shouting 'Down with the traitors!' Except for one high-spirited young fellow whom we did not know and who repeated the same cry, all the other passengers in the omnibus were paralysed with fear. 'Keep quiet!' they implored in terror, 'you will get us all massacred!' The soldiers listened in grim silence: their brigadier turned to us in a threatening way and waved his sword: the crowd looked on, dazed. . . . I was in a whirl of excitement. . . . Vaguely I fancied that a conflict must arise, and that either from the crowd or from the troops the spark must come which would light the flame. I longed for the soldiers to use their sabres or for the people to raise a yell of fury. But nothing happened—no slashing, no shouting. . . . Directly afterwards the regiment galloped off and the omnibus resumed its way." Such is the incident of the Boulevard Saint-Martin. Evidently in that bus there was a hero: the difficulty is to know which was the one. For—sad to say—in later years, when the *Histoire d'un Crime* was published (1877), it was Hugo's companion Arnaud who claimed for himself the glory of having put his head out and addressed the troops. He would not even allow the poet a share of that glory, for he soundly asserted that, "while I was speaking, Hugo, sitting near me, kept tugging at my coat-tails and saying, 'For Heaven's sake, keep quiet! Keep quiet, man, I say, or you will get us all killed!"

Who shall decide between these conflicting accounts? Perhaps both of them cried "Down with the traitors!" Perhaps neither said it, though both thought it.

Scene 4. *A few hours later.* In a wine-merchant's back shop in the Rue de la Roquette, at dusk, Hugo talks to a mechanic who tells him that the Faubourg Saint-Marceau will rise that night. "All we want is a leader," says the man: will you, citizen Victor Hugo, be our leader?"—"Aye, that I will; are you sure that you will be ready to-night?"—"Yes, at one o'clock:

we are all armed and ready."—"Very well; directly the first barricade is up, I shall be behind it. Come and fetch me."—"Where shall I find you?"—"*Wherever I may be.*"

Perhaps the address is too vague: at any rate the rising does not come off: the Faubourg Saint-Marceau remains quiet.

Scene 5. Late that night, in the Rue Popincourt, whither it has moved as safer than the Rue Blanche, the Committee is sitting, talking, framing proclamations. Suddenly in dashes a working man in blue blouse to tell them that the troops have discovered their retreat and are close upon them. At once Hugo addresses the meeting: eloquently draws the contrast between the two causes—between the strength of the usurping Government and the weakness of his friends and himself. "On one side there is an army and crime, on the other a handful of men and Right! Choose!" Nobly they all declare for Right against Might, should they perish where they sit. Happily, however, before the oration is concluded, the troops have marched away—either failing to discover the place or not wanting to.

Scene 6. After passing the night at a friend's house, Hugo next morning (December 3) ventures home to the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne. There he hears that the police have been to arrest him, and have only just gone away. What an escape! Doubtless, they will be back again soon. So picking up a few things he hastens off to the appointed meeting-place of the patriots, 15 Rue Richelieu. Something must be done: why are the multitude so slow to rise? Proclamations are drawn up, one for the people, another for the soldiers. Louis Bonaparte is branded as a traitor, and his deposition declared. It is more difficult to get these proclamations printed, for the presses have all been seized by the minions of the *coup d'état*. However, a lithographic apparatus is found, and a certain number

of copies are reproduced and fixed up—looking very small and insignificant beside the flaming posters of the usurper.

Scene 7. Bent on some desperate deed Hugo goes forth on the Boulevards. Meeting Jules Simon and a friend, he says to the former: "Supposing I went and got myself killed in the Latin quarter, and my corpse were carried through the streets, do you think that would make the students rise?"—"I have no doubt it would," replies Jules Simon. And with a warm pressure of the hand, they part. Horror-stricken, Simon's friend says to him: "Surely, he doesn't mean it?"—"Oh yes," answers the other, "he is sincere; but . . . it's a good long way from here to the Latin quarter."[1] So, on reflection, Hugo seems to have thought. At any rate he does not cross the river, but taking a cab drives to the Place de la Bastille.

Scene 8. *The lion's mouth.* In the Place he finds himself confronted by three regiments with a general and staff—not to speak of any number of police. Observe how he comports himself: "Stopping the cab, I took off my representative's scarf which I was wearing. Then lowering the window, I waved this scarf in front of the troops. 'Soldiers,' I exclaimed, 'look at this! It is the symbol of law—the outward sign of the nation's authority. . . . Return to your duty. It is a representative of the people who speaks to you, and he who represents the people represents the army. . . . Soldiers, you are still citizens. Listen to me! You are violating the Law. Louis Bonaparte is dragging you into crime. Soldiers, you who personify Honour, listen to me who personify Duty. Louis Bonaparte is a robber and an assassin: all his accomplices will follow him to the hulks. Nay, they are there already: to deserve the chain is to wear it. Look at that man at

[1] This anecdote, needless to say, is not related by Hugo; it belongs to the reminiscences of Jules Simon.

your head, who dares to give you orders. You fancy that he is a general; he is a convict!'

"*The soldiers seemed petrified.* Just then one of the people standing near clutched my arm and whispered to me, 'They will shoot you.' But I paid no heed. Waving my scarf, I continued: 'You there, in general's uniform—it is you I am speaking to. You know who I am—a representative of the people; and I know what you are—a criminal. Would you like to know my name.' (And I called it out.) 'And now tell me your name.' He made no reply; and I went on: 'No matter; I do not require to know your name as a general, I shall know your number as a convict.' The man in general's uniform bent his head in shame: the rest remained silent. . . . A vast feeling of contempt rose up within me, and I drove on."

After "petrifying" the soldiers and pulverising their officers—who seem to have stood it all like lambs—Hugo proceeded to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where the usual barricades were built or building. On that night of December 3 the crisis of the *coup d'état* had been reached. Now that the first paralysis of surprise was over, it became evident to Bonaparte and his supporters that there was a growing disposition to resist their high-handed action. This disposition it was necessary at all costs to crush. Many and anxious were the deliberations that evening at the Elysée: late into the night the newly installed telegraph between the Prefecture of Police and the Ministry of the Interior was constantly working. The Prefect, alarmed by the reports from his agents in different parts of the town, kept informing and consulting his colleague. To M. de Morny, most elegant and casual of conspirators, M. de Maupas seemed unnecessarily nervous and fussy: besides, he wanted to turn in for the night. And so his replies grew more curt. To one anxious message he answered: "Don't worry, it's all right for the present"; to another, a few minutes later: "Nothing can be done till to-

morrow. Good night." And when once again came the infernal "click-click," out of all patience now, he wired back: "Oh! go to bed and be d—d!" Next morning the uncertainties of the night were ended by a decision which converted a revolution hitherto almost bloodless into wholesale and indiscriminate carnage. "Let my orders be executed," was the sinister message from the Elysée. Then it was the turn of Saint-Arnaud and his men. The artillery swept the streets and destroyed the barricades, while—to complete the work of terrorism—the troops, well primed with doles and drink, amused themselves with musketry practice at all and sundry. The "massacre of the Boulevards"—especially the Boulevard Montmartre—consummated the crime and secured its success.

Henceforth, resistance being useless, nothing remained for Hugo and his friends except to consult their own safety. And lo! on this same day (December 4) a horrid rumour gets abroad that a price has been set on the poet's head—25,000 francs for any one who shall bring him alive or dead. The rumour had its origin, perhaps, in theatrical circles (there is a note from Alexandre Dumas to Bocage on the subject); at any rate it was plausible enough to gain credence and perpetuation. Accordingly we have a picture of Hugo, homeless and seeking a shelter, wandering through Paris for several hours. He is accompanied by "a noble and devoted woman, Mme. D." (so one ingenious writer words it, for all the world as if Juilette were now being introduced to us for the first time, and in the character of a special Providence); and while he remains muffled up and sitting far back in the cab, she knocks in vain at one door after another. At last a generous soul is found to take him in; and there, hermetically sealed, Hugo stays for the next week. His presence is revealed to no one; and the fugitive, whose room adjoins his host's *salle à manger*—separated from it by folding-doors with a large sideboard placed

against them—has often the pleasure of hearing visitors at luncheon or dinner speculating on Victor Hugo's fate —whether he has been caught and shot, or whether he has escaped from Paris.

In these adventures—as in the *Histoire d'un Crime* itself—there is a mixture of fact and fancy. That Hugo was in hiding from December 4–11, during which time he managed to communicate once or twice under assumed names with his wife; and that on the 11th, with a passport in the name of "Lanvin," procured for him by his brother-in-law, Victor Foucher, and disguised as a working man, he left Paris for Brussels—of these facts there is no doubt. But the legendary part of the affair is that which represents him as in imminent peril of his life, tracked by Bonapartist spies and only just escaping by the skin of his teeth. In reality, the game of hide-and-seek seems to have been one in which it was all hide and no seek. Such, at least, is the testimony of M. de Maupas, somewhat tarnishing to the romantic picture we might otherwise have conceived. When the *Histoire d'un Crime* was published, Granier de Cassagnac wrote to the ex-Prefect of Police and received this reply (dated September 27, 1878): "Victor Hugo flatters himself when he says that a price was put on his head, and in any case 25,000 francs would have been a very big price. Morny gave me orders to arrest him, but I refused to do so. Victor Hugo was not in the least dangerous, though, if arrested, he would have been an embarrassment. I can assure you, however, that he concealed himself very carefully, and showed himself at no point where there was the least chance of danger. His part throughout was that of the organiser-at-a-safe-distance." And in his *Mémoires* a few years later M. de Maupas added:

"We knew quite well where Hugo was staying, and we could have arrested him ten times over if we had wanted to. But it was not our interest to do so, and it was entirely with our consent that he—like M. de

Girardin and a few other visionaries—was allowed to go on with his agitations."

This evidence is generally accepted as conclusive; not that one would suspect M. de Maupas of being overburdened with veracity, but because his statement agrees with the balance of probability, and there is no obvious reason why it should be false.[1]

Hugo, however, though not quite so much an object of concern to the Government as he supposed, had the satisfaction of being deemed sufficiently dangerous to be included among the sixty-six members of the late Assembly whose expulsion from France was decreed on January 9, 1852. At that time he had been in Brussels a month. His two sons had not been able to accompany him, for they were both, at the time of the *coup d'état*, imprisoned in the Conciergerie for articles written in *L'Evénement:* so also were Vacquerie and Meurice—in fact the whole staff of the paper, which now came to a natural end. Mme. Hugo had remained in Paris to look after their house; and to her (by the name of "Mme. Rivière" and signing himself "Albert Durand") the poet wrote on December 12 to announce his safe arrival in Brussels. In another letter, two days later, speaking of his recent adventures, he says: "For twelve days I was between life and death, but I have had no fear. . . . I am lodging in the Porte Verte Hotel, room No. 9, my neighbour being Versigny, another refugee representative. . . . I lead a hermit's life in a room with one little bed, two rush-bottomed chairs, and no fire. My total cost of living is 3 francs per day." Then follow instructions about sending him some garments. He mentions also that he had seen the Belgian Minister of the Interior, and had spoken of his intention to write at once a history of the *coup d'état*, whereupon the Minister had begged him not to do

[1] On December 7—at the very moment when they were supposed to be seeking Hugo's life—the Government allowed the Théâtre Français to play *Marion Delorme*.

anything which would get Belgium into trouble with France. On December 28 he sends a letter by Dumas, who was going to Paris, in which he says : " I am very popular here. . . . Yesterday at a banquet a toast was drunk to the three men who personify resistance to tyranny—Mazzini, Kossuth, Victor Hugo." Later on he tells of a proposal that had been made to him to publish in London an anti-Bonapartist paper, directed by himself, Louis Blanc, and Pierre Leroux ; but he doubts whether he would care to be associated in the public eye with those two names. . . . " It is rumoured that Bonaparte wants to have me arrested here, but I am assured that I shall be well defended. . . . In my book I will treat him as he deserves. I take upon myself to give that *drôle* his proper place in history." On the whole, Hugo—who was a Chevalier of the Order of Leopold—was well pleased with the cordiality of his reception. One day the Burgomaster—or Mayor—of Brussels called upon him with sympathy and good wishes, and before leaving asked if there was anything he could do. " Only one thing," said Hugo, "*don't* whitewash the façade of your Hôtel de Ville ! "

To explain this remark it should be said that, after several changes, Hugo had in January found a permanent lodging in the Grande Place facing the fine Hôtel de Ville. His abode was modest enough—the upper part of a tobacconist's shop—but the outlook must have appealed to his artistic tastes. Juliette Drouet had been the first of his intimate circle to come to Brussels ; his son Charles was soon able to rejoin him (though the young man's indisposition to work seems to have worried the father a good deal) ; and there was no lack of brothers in misfortune—some 250 of them—in the Belgian capital. Uneventfully the time passed, the chief daily excitement being the frugal luncheon and dinner at which little bands of exiles used to meet in one or other of the cheap restaurants where in those days you could get a plentiful meal—

soup, meat, vegetables, dessert, and beer—for one franc, while if you took a second glass of beer that was twopence extra. Economy, no doubt, was necessary. The interdiction of Hugo's dramas was a heavy loss to him, though it is difficult to accept his statement that it meant the temporary reduction of his income to little more than one-tenth of what it had been.[1] We are to understand, however, that at the beginning of his exile he had only about £300 a year, with nine persons more or less dependent on him. It is true that the sale of his poems and novels was not prohibited in France, but they suffered from a kind of boycott applied to them by all those who desired to stand well with the Court; and meanwhile his books were freely pirated in foreign countries without the author receiving a penny therefrom. And so we can quite believe that Hugo found himself none too well off. There were others, of course, much more straitened than he, and these, he tells us, he helped so far as his small means allowed. Not so much, however, it seems, as some of them expected: at any rate, there were not wanting those who accused him of parading poverty as an excuse for meanness, and who declared that the poet—after ostentatiously sharing the poor man's dinner in a cheap eating-house—went off elsewhere to enjoy a sumptuous banquet. A calumny we may be sure, and the sort of calumny that might easily originate in the bitter heart and empty stomach of some poor penniless devil.

A certain amount of social gaiety the exiles enjoyed, thanks chiefly to Alexandre Dumas, who was in Brussels at this time—a financial, not a political refugee. The late proprietor of the Château Monte-Cristo was by way

[1] It is impossible to arrive at the truth in these matters. Hugo in the Preface of *Pendant l'Exil* declares that his dramas had been bringing in 60,000 francs a year. But according to the figures in M. Biré's careful calculation (relating to the five years preceding the *coup d'état*) the amount should be nearer 6000 francs than 60,000! Hugo seems to have added a cipher—that is all.

of practising retrenchment and reform, but his interpretation of these virtues was liberal and did not prevent him from giving some princely entertainments. In such festivities Hugo, it seems, took little part ; his life was that of a recluse, his business was before all things to expose and brand the criminal who ruled in Paris. Immediately on his arrival he had set himself to write the "History of a Crime"—or, as he at first called it, *Le Crime du Deux Décembre*, and by May he had finished the work. Why it was put away and not published until twenty-five years later is a mystery that has never been quite solved. In his Preface of October 1, 1877, the author writes : "It was chance—the accumulation of other work and worries and troubles—that delayed the appearance of the history to the present date. But now it is more than timely, it is urgent. I publish it." The urgency referred to arose from symptoms of anti-republican reaction, but as to the "chance" which kept the book hidden away for all those years, the explanation is rather thin. It is possible, of course, that Hugo came to the conclusion that a direct and personal attack on Bonaparte would be more effective, and for that reason substituted *Napoléon le Petit* for the *Histoire d'un Crime ;* it is possible also that, aware how much of romance was mixed with his "history" and how liable to challenge and contradiction it would be if published at once, he deliberately postponed it to a more convenient season, when the events would no longer be fresh in men's memories. And this would apply not only to such of his own adventures as belong to the sphere of disputable heroism, but also to those pages in which—darkly and on the casual evidence of a nameless and unknown passer-by—he relates certain *choses noires* which would stain the *coup d'état* with an even deeper shade of black than that in which it is commonly painted : secret fusillades carried out by night to relieve the congestion of the prisons, batches of poor creatures marched away to be

shot in cold blood, their corpses carted off quickly and silently to pits in the Montmartre cemetery—horrors which Hugo was ready to believe true, but which were indignantly denied and remain unsupported by any corroborative details. In short, the "History of a Crime" was not quite historical enough to justify its label at the moment; bottled up for a quarter of a century, it would have more substance. Legends, like wine, improve by keeping.

At once, on finishing this work, Hugo set himself to compose, still at white heat, what is perhaps the most scathing indictment ever delivered against a public man. Taking for title the effective phrase he had invented in his speech on the Revision of the Constitution, and dividing his subject into such headings as "L'homme," "Le Gouvernement," "Le Crime," &c., he lashed, with every epithet of abuse, scorn, and ridicule, the man of December 2 and his myrmidons. It was no long task. The facts were in his head, the fury in his heart—a doubly distilled fury since Louis Bonaparte had not only betrayed the Republic but had also wounded Hugo's pride and baulked his political ambition. Hence a sincerity of wrath which none can doubt. Often as the writer had employed artificial vehemence for literary effect, there is nothing artificial in his denunciation of the "man who would tarnish the background of history, and in the foreground is simply a pollution"; . . . the man who has not, like his uncle, "conquered empire but has filched it like a pickpocket" . . . whose "great talent is silence and who, when he breaks silence, does not speak but lies—lies naturally, as other men breathe" . . . who has "bandaged the eyes of France and gagged her mouth" . . . whose officials are "not officials but *accomplices.*" . . . "Sultan Bonaparte, served by a lackey called Rouher, a valet called Troplong and a eunuch called Baroche." . . . "Why delay the formal declaration of the Empire? Why not at once send out to Europe this bulletin—'The

treason of December 2 has been safely delivered of an Empire. Mother and child are doing badly ' ? " Here are a few stray sentences taken at random, not selected as the strongest that might be found, nor yet the best suited for illustrating the many flashes of grim humour that illumine the book and relieve the monotony of perpetual invective. *Napoléon le Petit* was written in a month and finished on that famous anniversary July 14. When Hugo had put *finis* to it, with the few drops of ink that remained he wrote on the label of the bottle :

De cette bouteille sortit
Napoléon le Petit.

Juliette Drouet, who had copied the MS., claimed and kept the ink-bottle.[1] The book was printed privately in London, the cost being borne by Hugo himself and his friend Hetzel, the publisher, a fellow-refugee. In spite of all precautions a good many copies found their way into France. One day some one ventured to show it to Louis Bonaparte, who, after turning over a few pages, said with a laugh to those around him : " Tenez, Messieurs ! voici Napoléon le Petit par Victor Hugo le Grand ! "

Meanwhile in Paris Mme. Hugo was occupied in winding up affairs. The house in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne was dismantled, the poet's belongings sold at auction (June 8 and 9). A melancholy occasion—the end of all things it seemed—to those familiar with the associations of so many precious objects, chairs and tables of carved oak, bronzes, marble busts, Boule clocks, porcelain, Venetian glass, tapestries, books, pictures, bric-à-brac of every kind—the accumulated treasures of twenty years. Gautier tried hard to form a club of purchasers among Hugo's friends, but without much success. Most of the lots fell to casual bidders—including the fine vellum-bound folio *Ronsard*, dedicated

[1] It was afterwards given, with Hugo's permission, to a certain doctor, and ultimately passed into the possession of Prince Napoleon, who, though a cousin of the Emperor, was a great admirer of the poet.

in 1828 to Hugo by Sainte-Beuve—though some were eventually repurchased and placed among the collected relics of the poet. It may be imagined, too, that in the crowd and the confusion there was a certain amount of polite pilfering of unconsidered trifles: one fashionable gentleman carried off *comme souvenir* a compass said to have belonged to Christopher Columbus. The proceeds of the sale—hardly £500—show that many of the articles must have gone dirt cheap. And when it was all over Mme. Hugo and her daughter Adèle remained in the empty house. And on these two lonely women in their sorrow the night fell. . . .

Next day Mme. Hugo, before leaving Paris, called on Sainte-Beuve: she had one thing to ask him, on the ground of their old friendship—that he would write nothing against her husband so long as the latter should be in exile. To which Sainte-Beuve, as in duty and courtesy bound, willingly assented. The wife and daughter had intended to proceed at once to Brussels, but letters from there changed their plans, so that instead of going to Belgium they stayed temporarily with friends. For Hugo wrote that he was himself about to leave Brussels and that it would be better for them to wait and join him in his new residence, wherever that might be—probably Jersey. The truth was that rumours of *Napoléon le Petit* had alarmed the Belgian authorities. They had already had trouble with France about the *Bulletin Français*, a journal published in Brussels by the Royalist section of the exiles: a prosecution of the Comte d'Haussonville and others responsible for it had taken place, and the defendants had been acquitted by a Belgian jury—much to the annoyance of the French Government. And now a worse storm was sure to arise over Hugo's forthcoming pamphlet. Poor little Belgium could not afford to quarrel with her powerful neighbour: such was the position in July 1852. It does not seem that the Cabinet explicitly discussed the poet's expulsion, but they gave him to understand—

through his friend, the Mayor of Brussels—that he was likely to get them into difficulties. Hugo took the hint, and despite the entreaties of his Republican fellow-exiles resolved to anticipate the inevitable by a voluntary departure. Accordingly on August 1 he proceeded to Antwerp, *en route* for London, accompanied by many friends who came to see him off; and there, being entertained at a banquet by French and Belgian democrats, he made a stirring speech about the "brotherhood of nations," the "Universal Republic," &c. In particular he warned his Belgian friends that the man Bonaparte might at any moment attack them; if so, let them defend themselves with stones, with knives, with pitchforks—with any weapon that came handy—against this Schinderhannes[1] who had converted the French army into "prætorians," "janissaries," "brigands." On the quay a large crowd assembled to bid him good-bye, among whom were Madier de Montjau, Charras, Deschanel, Schoelcher, &c.; and when the *Ravensbourne* got under way there was much waving of handkerchiefs and shouting of "Vive Hugo!" "Vive la République!" As the vessel moved down the river the last object remaining visible on the quay was the portly figure and the white waistcoat of Alexandre Dumas. From London Hugo wrote to his wife that he was about to see Ledru Rollin, Kossuth, and Mazzini, "in order to discuss with them the interests of European democracy," after which he should proceed at once to Jersey, where he hoped she would join him. Whether the conference on European democracy took place we know not, but Hugo's stay in London lasted only two days and on August 5 he reached St. Helier.

Such are the circumstances in which the first stage of the poet's exile ended. They do not quite correspond to his own account, in which we are told that a special

[1] A notable brigand chief of the Rhine at the end of the eighteenth century. This and "Cartouche" become now favourite designations of Louis Napoleon.

law was passed by the Belgian Parliament to expel him. But, in fact, the "loi Fadier" (so called from the name of its introducer), which empowered the Government to deal summarily with writings or speeches derogatory to foreign princes, was not passed or even framed until three months after Hugo had left Brussels. And it was the affair of the *Bulletin Français* even more than the case of Hugo which made it seem desirable.

CHAPTER XIV

1852–1855

First impressions of Jersey : Hugo *bossu* : Records of the *Journal de l'Exil* : Table-turning, &c. : *Les Châtiments* : Hugo on the Crimean War : Letter to Lord Palmerston *re* Tapner : Espionage : The affair of Hubert : Correspondence under difficulties : Picture of daily life in Marine Terrace : Attacks on Anglo-French Alliance : Suppression of *L'Homme* : Expulsion from Jersey : Arrival in Guernsey

On reaching St. Helier, Hugo, after spending a few days at the *Pomme d'Or*, found in 3 Marine Terrace—at that time rather isolated from the town—a furnished house, which he took at a rental of £60 per year. It was a plain grey building, of one story, flat and "tomb-like" in shape (as the poet called it). The rooms were meagrely furnished but clean and fresh-painted. The north front looked on to a little-frequented road ; the south side opened to a garden which, well planted with roses and tamarisks, and descending in terraces to the sea-shore, was the one redeeming feature of the place. In this house the Hugos established themselves, and with them Auguste Vacquerie, who since his brother's death had been regarded as one of the family. The new-comers were well pleased with the scenery and climate around them ; they were consoled by the semi-French character of the island and by the similarities they discovered to their native land. Many of Hugo's letters express his appreciation of this "idyll in the ocean" : in one (to Villemain) he discovered that Jersey was an exact replica of the Grecian isle of Lemnos. Another pleasant impression at the outset was that of freedom. "Here," writes Mme. Hugo, "there is no

supervision: the *gendarme* and the *sergent de ville* are unknown: passports are documents the very meaning of which would be unintelligible. Every one comes and goes at his or her fancy."

As to the people of Jersey, it seems that they were only moderately interested in Hugo either as a poet or as a martyr to the cause of liberty; they regarded him, however, with considerable deference as one who had been a "Peer of France." But the tenants of 3 Marine Terrace did not go in much for visiting. Mme. Hugo shrank from formal calls, and sought to limit rather than extend her circle of acquaintance, though she was glad that the young people should have dances and other amusements. Vacquerie, in his many reminiscences of this period, has made all the usual comments—usual at any rate in those days—about the dullness and decorum of British ideas as illustrated in Jersey society. Sunday, of course, was especially a day of terror, and when the exiles indulged on the Sabbath in a game of billiards (there was a table in Marine Terrace) they felt bound, before beginning, to close the shutters lest any stray passer-by might be scandalised by the click of the balls. Among other trivialities recorded by the same pen we have a local version of the legend about Hugo's "hump," originally started years before by Heine's remark that a writer so fond of characters morally or physically deformed must himself be *bossu*. Some people, it seems, who had heard of or read this opinion, had taken the alleged peculiarity in quite a literal sense, and one day when the poet and some of his friends were bathing they were surprised to find themselves being examined through glasses from a distance by a party of visitors. Bonapartist spies, perhaps? No. For Vacquerie, rather indignant and curious to find out what was the attraction, approached the party and defiantly asked one of them the time of day. Having received this valuable information, he was requested in his turn to be kind

enough to say which of the bathers was M. Hugo. His indication of the poet was received with incredulity. "Surely," exclaimed one of the visitors, "that cannot be M. Hugo! I don't see any hump on his back." From which little absurdity one may judge how dangerous it is for an author to have created a Han d'Islande, a Triboulet, a Quasimodo.

One of the amusements of the family was, as we know, to keep a so-called *Journal de l'Exil*, written by François Hugo and consisting chiefly of jottings of conversations held at the luncheon or dinner table. It is fortunate that Victor Hugo's reputation does not depend on the sayings attributed to him in this family chronicle, which is in truth a chronicle of the very smallest beer. Evidently the usual method was for one of the family—generally Charles, who (we are told) was a *beau parleur*—to start a subject by some remark which would give scope for the poet's sentiments. Thus the elder son—who was a great Radical and iconoclast—launches his opinion on the utter degeneracy of modern literature, an opinion which the father naturally demolishes with many words. Or perhaps Charles declares that the Book of Job has been much overrated and is very tedious stuff; and this gives Hugo, who knows his Job by heart, a good opening for repeating most of it. . . . On another day it is a question of great conquerors (Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar, &c.), whom the poet declares to be agents of progress, "violent civilisers." "What about Attila and his merry men?" asks Charles. "Oh! they don't count," is the reply: "they only came south because they wanted to get into the sunshine." The satisfactory conclusion, however, is reached that "men of the sword are inferior to men of the pen. . . ." On another occasion we hear Hugo in his favourite vein as expounder of the ways of God and Man. "Yes," he says, "God exists, but being absolute and perfect He has not created the perfect and the absolute, because then He would have just

reproduced himself. He has created the imperfect and the relative, and among this He has placed Man. . . . Mineral life passes into organic vegetable life, and this in its turn into animal life, of which the highest specimen is the ape. Above the ape begins intellectual life, and Man occupies the lowest degree in this great intellectual scale by which each spirit mounts to eternity and of which the summit is God. . . ." But the conversation did not always soar to these heights, and when it descended to the plane of personalities, what Hugo said about those he disliked may easily be imagined ; nothing that he said could be stronger than what he has written in *Les Châtiments*. For the Bonapartist gang and all who supported it he had no mercy.[1] He seems to have seriously discussed the feasibility of going to Paris in a balloon and showering copies of *Napoléon le Petit* all over the place !

Another matter frequently referred to in the *Journal* is table-turning, which pastime, imported from America, was just now at the height of its European vogue. The poet was considerably exercised as to the reality of these revelations. "The spirits tell me wonderful things," he writes to Mme. de Girardin, "and they confirm the views on cosmogony that I have held for many years." We wonder whether they—or the "lying spirits" among them—predicted to Hugo the early downfall of his enemy ; for that was a hope by which for the first two or three years the exiles were

[1] The most distinguished man of letters who was on intimate terms with the Emperor and Empress was Prosper Mérimée. And of him Hugo's opinion was that he was "by nature abject" (*naturellement vil*). This remark appears in *L'Histoire d'un Crime*, and may have been inserted in that book before publication in 1877 as a return of compliment for what Mérimée had written of Hugo in the *Lettres à une Inconnue* (published in 1874). In one of these letters he says : "Has Hugo lately become mad, or has he always been so ?" And again : "*Il se grise de ses paroles* et ne prend pas la peine de penser." The first clause of this sentence reminds us, by the way, of the fairly common metaphor which Disraeli afterwards elaborated when he spoke of Gladstone as "inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity."

constantly buoyed up. At the outbreak of the Crimean War they felt certain that it would be fatal to Napoleon III., just as the Moscow expedition had been the beginning of the end for Napoleon I. But on the subject of spirit manifestations in general Hugo's attitude is judicious and impartial, as this remark, bearing internal evidence of genuineness, shows: "Great minds are serious in the presence of mystery, of the night, of the unknown. They do not say 'yes' or 'no'; they do not affirm like the credulous or deny like the sceptical."

And then, besides the table-turning, Marine Terrace had another supernatural excitement—nothing less than a ghost of its own, "the White Lady," who seems, after the usual unsatisfactory manner of ghosts, to have done all sorts of mischievous little things. Not only did Victor hear strange sounds in his room, but one night when Mme. Hugo had forgotten to blow out her candle before going to sleep she awoke to find herself in darkness. Puzzle—who blew out the candle? In justice to "the White Lady" it must be said that she once gave an opportunity of closer acquaintance, for the table-rapping announced that she would be present in the street at 3 A.M. Strange to say, no one felt equal to facing her; but Hugo, who was awake at that hour, on the stroke of three heard the front-door bell ring violently. "Ghosts are punctual," he said.

It would be inexcusable to record such trifles were it not that they afford some relief to the very sombre and serious side of Jersey life. Hugo had not come there to play at exile, but rather by all the means at his disposal—by whatever the spoken or written word could effect—to wage war against what he conceived to be the powers of darkness. Each step taken since the *coup d'état* had pledged him more irrevocably to resistance. His declaration at Brussels, "when Liberty returns to France, I will return—not till then"; his speech at

Antwerp; the publication of *Napoléon le Petit;* his pronouncement of October 31, 1852—made in view of the approaching plebiscite which was to re-establish the Empire—wherein he recommended his countrymen to refrain from voting and concluded with these truculent words: "In presence of M. Bonaparte and his government, the citizen worthy of that name has only one thing to do—to load his gun and await the hour"—all this had placed Hugo outside the pale of conciliation or compromise, except at the sacrifice of his self-esteem, and that was the last sacrifice he was likely to make. Before leaving Brussels he had partly written the masterpiece of lyrical satire which was to annihilate whatever of Louis Bonaparte was left after *Napoléon le Petit,* and the completion of this work occupied his first year in Jersey. In one of his letters he says: "*Napoléon le Petit* being in prose was only half the task. The creature was only cooked on one side: I am now turning him over on the grill." Nothing could better convey the personal resentment which forms the main motive of *Les Châtiments* and indeed obscures its other purpose as a work of avenging justice. Here, as with Juvenal, *facit indignatio versum;* though Hugo's indignation sounds less disinterested than that of the Roman satirist. The literary effectiveness of *Les Châtiments* is none the less for that, but only their polemical value. "Grotesque," "exaggerated," "monstrous," may be the words that constantly occur to the reader's mind; yet he cannot but admire alike the ferocious vigour of the attack and the skill with which the poet marshals his forces so as to realise all their fighting value. For Hugo is too much of an artist to be unaware that unrelieved invective would be wearisome. And so there are interludes of a milder tone—lulls in the storm, so to speak, artfully contrived to enhance the renewal of its full fury; as when several stanzas celebrating the devotion of a martyred missionary lead up to a savage outburst

against the false priests in France who aid and sanction a crime :

> Pour être cardinaux, pour être sénateurs,
>
> . . . . .
>
> Ils vendent Jésus-Christ : ils vendent Jésus-Christ !

Or, again, when a peaceful apostrophe to Nature, such as,

> O soleil, ô face divine,
> Fleurs sauvages de la ravine,
> &c. &c.,

terminates abruptly in :

> Que pensez-vous de ce bandit ?

Elsewhere the process of transition is reversed, and from a violent beginning the verses pass to a gentle end. There is no need to mention famous passages such as the *Expiation* piece (in Book 5) or the *Miserere* refrain (in Book 2). Apart from these and many others the achievement of *Les Châtiments* as a whole was to enlarge the vocabulary of abuse and to show that Hugo's principles of brotherhood and charity did not apply to his enemies. (In one piece and within a few lines Bonaparte is "Cartouche," "Mandrin," "Sylla," "Néron repu," "*pourceau* dans le cloaque et *loup* dans le charnier." He is also "a cockney of Epsom and Eglinton," "a parrot having a great name as his perch," "an ape in a tiger-skin," and many other things still more impolite. Well might some one, who had read in an English paper that "several phrases in *Les Châtiments* were untranslatable," inquire of Hugo whether by this it was meant that they were obscene. To which the poet's reply was : "I can quite think so, for Bonaparte comes in at almost every line.") *L'Empire au Pilori*, and *César Mandrin* were among suggested titles for the book before its name was definitely decided on ; but no one can doubt that *Les Châtiments* was a happier solution, and one more proper to that whip of many scourges with which the author lashes not only the chief

criminal and his accomplices, but so many others against whom he had old scores to settle—political, literary, and personal.[1] *Les Châtiments,* apart from a mutilated version produced in Brussels, was published in its complete form at Jersey in October 1853; and as with *Napoléon le Petit,* the expense of publication was defrayed by Hugo himself. Hundreds —perhaps thousands—of copies were by one means or another smuggled into France. Sometimes with a tin covering on each side it passed as a sardine-box, or else it was wrapped up in skeins of wool. Very often it escaped seizure by being cut up into seven or eight bits sent to different addresses—*disjecta membra* which the consignee had to collect and put together. In Europe, generally among average non-partisan readers, the violence of the book caused it to be regarded more as the scream of passion than as the protest of conscience.

And there was another way in which the voice of the exile made itself heard. On reaching Jersey, Hugo was welcomed by a colony of refugees already there, mostly Frenchmen (Edgar Quinet, Etienne Arago, Esquiros, Ribeyrolles, &c.), but including also Poles, Hungarians, Italians—a motley crowd, some of them sincere patriots, others irredeemable scoundrels. Of these people Hugo became naturally the leader and the spokesman, thus assuming by force of circumstances a sort of European position instead of a merely national one. They had no mind to let themselves be forgotten: they could talk if they could do nothing else, or rather, Hugo could talk for them and give eloquence to their demonstrations. There was no lack of occasions.

[1] *Faussaires, meurtriers, escrocs, forbans, voleurs,* sums up the people of the *coup d'état* (among whom Saint-Arnaud is *chacal, chien, galérien, traître*); Montalembert is *Judas vipère, renard;* Louis Veuillot, the editor of the Catholic *L'Univers,* gets paid back for many caustic criticisms by several pages of abuse. And any number of names, entered years back in Hugo's black book, are dragged in—as we have noticed before—with some opprobrious epithet attached to them.

Sometimes one of the exiles died and a funeral oration was delivered over his grave; or else it was some great date in the calendar of democracy—the anniversary of the outbreak of the Polish rebellion, or that of the French Revolution of February 1848—which served as an opportunity for a discourse, reported in the local papers and finding its way into those of foreign countries. These speeches are all variations, more or less elaborate, of the same theme—"Long live Republicanism, Liberty, and Fraternity! Down with Tyranny!" In the Polish celebrations the Tsar of Russia was naturally the chief object of invective; but when the Crimean War broke out and these two *bêtes noires*—Nicholas and Napoléon—were fighting each other, there could be no doubt which of the two was the arch-criminal. And so the Russian Emperor, who had been a "Prince worthy of the galleys," becomes quite a secondary villain, to be pitied as a victim to the machinations of "the French Schinderhannes," with whom rests the whole responsibility for the war—"because M. Bonaparte, who murdered Paris, has taken a fancy to get the benediction of M. Mastai, who stifled Rome." It is evident that these events in the East put on Hugo's patriotism a strain it could hardly bear. If he does not absolutely exult in reverses to the French arms, he cannot but recognise in deaths by war or pestilence the retribution of Heaven upon those concerned in the *coup d'état*—the leaders, that is (Lourmel, Saint-Arnaud, &c.); as to the rank and file, they deserve pardon. ("Grâce, mon Dieu, pour les soldats; mais quant aux chefs, faites!") An especial offence to him was the alliance of England with the usurper. "For England to make common cause with M. Bonaparte," he says, "is more than a loss of moral force, it is a catastrophe."

When he spoke thus, the poet had already another grievance against the English Government, caused by the affair of Tapner, the Guernsey murderer, who had been hanged in February 1854 in spite of

petitions for his reprieve, in which Hugo had taken the lead. The failure of his efforts in this case he chose to attribute to the influence of the French Ambassador in London. And so, on February 11, the day after Tapner's execution, he addressed to Lord Palmerston a letter which was less a dignified protest than an insolent declamation. "He was loth indeed to believe that the Queen of England could have allowed her prerogative of pardon to be vetoed by M. Bonaparte. And what had Tapner's crime been? He had broken into a house and murdered a woman. But if instead of killing one woman he had killed three hundred, as well as old men and children—if, instead of breaking open a door, he had violated an oath—if, instead of stealing a few shillings, he had laid hands on twenty-five millions—why then, instead of being hanged in Guernsey, he would have had an Ambassador in London." To Palmerston personally he says: "You and I inhabit the infinitely little. I am only an outlaw, you are only a Minister: I am ashes, you are dust. One atom may speak to another. . . . You statesmen, between two dinners, two protocols, two smiles, cool and indifferent, with white-gloved hand, you press the spring that makes the trap fall beneath the condemned man's feet. Do you know what that trap is? It is the infinite, the unfathomable, the unknown!" And much more in this style. No better specimen could be found of that unmeasured irrelevancy which made Hugo as a controversialist so futile and so ridiculous.[1]

But, apart from exaggerated grievances, the condition of exile had many real inconveniences, one of which was the constant sense of being spied upon. The Imperial police kept itself well informed of what was being said and done in Jersey, and among the refugees there

[1] One of the first things Hugo did when he arrived in Guernsey at the end of 1855 was to visit the cell where Tapner had been confined. After which he proceeded to the grave, from which he plucked a handful of grass and put it in his pocket-book as a memento.

was no doubt more than one of the familiar *agent provocateur* type, whose business it was to send confidential reports to Paris. "Exile," says Hugo, "is not glory, but it has this resemblance to glory—that they are both infested by vermin." The case of one of these human vermin, Hubert by name, is partly told in *Choses Vues*. The man had always been markedly forward in denunciations of Bonaparte, and this may have excited suspicion against him; but he was "given away" at last by the jealousy of a woman, and from a search of his papers was proved to be a Government spy. Many of the exiles in their fury would have lynched him then and there. From this rash act Hugo's intervention dissuaded them, and a more civilised way was found of dealing with the scoundrel. It appeared that he was heavily in debt, chiefly to his landlord, and the latter was persuaded to use his rights, under Jersey law, of sending the debtor to prison. Hubert, therefore, was locked up, and the cost of his keep—at the rate of 1*s.* 3*d.* per day—was defrayed by Hugo and some others, each of whom paid a week in turn. But—and this is where the story becomes entertaining—after a while the exiles found the charge a heavy burden on their slender resources; and one fine morning when the official called on Hugo (whose turn it was) for his weekly subscription, the poet said, "What if I do not pay?" "In that case," replied the man, "the prisoner will be set at liberty again." "Very good," said Hugo, "then I decline to pay." Thus Hubert the spy was released and lost no time in getting out of the island, while the poet not only saved himself 8*s.* 9*d.* but enjoyed the moral satisfaction of having given pardon and freedom to an enemy.

Another of the drawbacks of exile was the difficulty of correspondence. Writing to friends in France and hearing from them was naturally a pleasure and a consolation, but it was considerably hampered by the operations of the *Cabinet Noir*. Any letter addressed

directly to Hugo was pretty certain to be intercepted and read, and might even fail to reach its destination ; so that important communications were generally sent by a roundabout course, and to an assumed name, through some other European country, and thence to Jersey. The poet's chief correspondent at this time was Paul Meurice, who, being in Paris, was able to look after Hugo's affairs there, paying or receiving moneys, interviewing one person or another, negotiating with publishers—doing all the hundred and one things that this most faithful and self-sacrificing of friends could do for his "cher et grand Maître." Most of the earlier letters in the recently published (1909) *Correspondance de Victor Hugo et Paul Meurice* are concerned with business matters of this sort, though they contain a few incidental references to "Boustrapa,"[1] his doings, and the chances of his downfall. One way or another, the poet managed to keep in touch with his old friend and his interests. Occasionally the wife or one of the sons visited Paris ; at other times visitors from Paris found their way to Marine Terrace. There they found the master of the house and his family much as Mme. Hugo describes them in her letters :

"My husband rises at daybreak and works the whole morning. At midday we all meet for *déjeuner*, and conversation is general. In the afternoon each one goes his own way—my husband for a walk in the country, my second son (who is the dandy of our party) into the town, while Charles stretches himself on the sofa with a pipe in his mouth. . . . Sometimes we have unexpected little pleasures—a ride or drive, or row in a boat, or the visit of some friend. . . . My husband is in treaty for the publication of a volume of poetry, *Les Contemplations*, but the arrangements are difficult to make—they take advantage of his position as an exile to make

[1] This was one of Hugo's names for Napoleon III., which occurs first in *Les Châtiments*. It was coined out of Boulogne-Strasburg-Paris—three stages in the usurper's career.

unfavourable offers. Of course the booksellers—that is the excuse—are not sure of the sale . . . 'Toto' [*i.e.* François-Victor Hugo] is translating Shakespeare. . . . Adèle takes notes for the *Journal de l'Exil* and practises her music. Our faithful Auguste [Vacquerie] writes plays which the authorities in France will not allow to be performed; he also occupies himself with photography, and we have now quite a fine album. I busy myself in mending stockings and socks, and do my best to keep down expenses, for we are very much impoverished. Since the beginning of our exile, not a single one of my husband's dramas has been performed, and they do their best to prevent the sale of his books. . . . And I must tell you, there is a work I am engaged on. In the evenings, after dinner, my husband tells me the story of his life, and this will eventually form a sort of *Memoirs*.[1] . . . Our household includes some dogs and cats—Charles being very fond of the one and Auguste of the other. Often we have musical evenings, when friends come in to sing and play, and we all enjoy it very much. Just fancy what a change that is—dogs and music in Victor Hugo's house! Well, it is true; yes, we are fond of all that now. Exile seems to have expanded our sympathies and increased our faculty of loving. . . ."

From this picture of the Hugo household in 1854, we see that every member of it was more or less occupied in literary work. The poet himself, besides having nearly finished *Les Contemplations*, was engaged on that long work entitled *Dieu*, which was not published until after his death. Meanwhile he kept an anxious eye on affairs in the East, which were not turning out altogether to his liking. His confident anticipation of Bonaparte's ruin—his belief that "the end is already visible and that there can be no other issue to 1855 except that of 1812"—were being notably falsified. The Crimean

[1] The reference, of course, is to *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie.*

War, so far from proving fatal to Louis Napoléon, increased his prestige and secured his position. The triumph of the allies, the Emperor's visit to London (which called forth the bitter pamphlet *A Louis Bonaparte*) and his cordial reception, the success of the great Paris Exhibition—all this was very mortifying to the exiles. But what filled their cup to overflowing was the return visit of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort to Paris in August 1855, and all the consequent interchange of civilities between the rulers of the two nations. Out of this arose the circumstances which brought Victor Hugo's stay in Jersey to an end. Already his denunciation of the Anglo-French alliance and his attacks on the Emperor had been felt in England as an embarrassment and an anomaly. A question in the House of Commons had referred to the poet as "an individual who has a sort of personal quarrel with the distinguished person whom the French people has chosen for its Sovereign," and to this Hugo had promptly replied by publishing a notice in some of the English papers in which he said: "Yes, the gentleman who speaks of a personal quarrel is right. My quarrel with M. Bonaparte *is* a personal quarrel—the old personal quarrel that exists between the judge on his bench and the accused in the dock."

Awkward as these incidents were, however, in view of our relations with Louis Napoléon, it is not likely that the British Government would have departed from its traditional hospitality to exiles or interfered with the independence of Jersey had not Hugo come into direct conflict with the sentiments of the place where he had found a refuge, and so made his position untenable. The Jerseyites may have been indifferent to the "personal quarrel" and the recriminations it involved, but they were intensely loyal to their Queen and would tolerate no aspersions upon her. Now the royal visit to Paris had, as we have said, provoked the furious wrath of all extreme

Anti-Bonapartists; and one of them—the notorious Félix Pyat—had written a protest against it in the form of a letter to Queen Victoria, apparently intended for the private delectation of the French refugees in London, of whom the writer was one. But the Jersey exiles had a little newspaper of their own called *L'Homme,* and the managers of this paper—chief of whom was Ribeyrolles—thought fit to publish Pyat's letter in their number of October 10, 1855.[1] The part of the vulgar effusion which gave most offence was doubtless the sentence: "You have sacrificed everything—your dignity as a Queen, your womanly scruples, your aristocratic pride, your English sentiment, your rank, your sex, even your modesty—for the sake of your new ally!" The appearance of this libel excited great and natural indignation in St. Helier. A public meeting, demanding the suppression of the newspaper, was held in the Assembly Rooms, and only the exertions of the police prevented an immediate raid upon the office. Next day a notification was received from the Lieutenant-Governor that Ribeyrolles and two others chiefly responsible for the journal must leave Jersey within six days. Hugo, of course, had had no hand in the publication of this objectionable stuff. But that he did not sincerely disapprove of it is shown by a private letter in which he characterises it as "clumsy and tactless, though substantially true," while in *Actes et Paroles* he goes so far as to call it "eloquent, ironical, and witty." It never seems to have occurred to him that an apology would have been in place—apologies were not in his line: on the contrary, he deemed it a matter of loyalty to espouse the cause of the offending paper, and to protest against the expulsion of its people. ("Expioulchioun," as he amuses himself by writing the word several times, mimicking—one supposes—what seemed to him the sound of the local

[1] It contained a feeble pun, *à propos* of the decoration conferred on General Canrobert: "Vous avez mis Canrobert au bain."

pronunciation, and producing thereby a word which suggests an enormous sniff of contempt.) Accordingly he drew up a tremendous manifesto, which was posted up on the walls of the town, and each paragraph of which began with "M. Bonaparte."

The document was, as may be supposed, not strictly concerned with the merits of the case, its main purpose being to rub in Hugo's conviction that everything done by the English Government was done at the behest of "M. Bonaparte." The defiant ending, "And now let them expel us!" was followed by Hugo's signature and those of thirty-five others. Ten days later, October 27, after communication with London, the Constable of St. Clement—the parish in which Marine Terrace lay—instructed by the Lieutenant-Governor, called upon Hugo to inform him that he and his sons could not be allowed to stay longer in the island: a week was given them to make their departure. Then occurred one of those scenes in which a filial pen has described the poet in his most impressive aspect.[1] We are to understand that the Constable, M. Lenepven, and his two attendants, having with polite regrets delivered their message, were requested to seat themselves. Hugo remains standing, with his family around him; and thus, dominating his audience, he harangues them at length on the iniquity of their proceedings, interspersing his oration here and there by peremptory questions addressed to the unfortunate Constable (such as, "Did not M. Bonaparte do this or that?"—"Was I not justified? Tell me."). Of course M. Lenepven and the other two have not a word to say: overpowered with shame (like the generals in the *coup d'état*) they hang their heads in silence. Hugo's main contention was that, as he had not been implicated in the newspaper offence, there was nothing in his subsequent protest to justify his expulsion. "However," says he, "I have no wish to stay here; indeed, were it possible, I would leave the island in a quarter of an

[1] Charles Hugo in *Les Hommes de l'Exil.*

hour." And then we come to the peroration, delivered with dignified emphasis: "Now, M. le Connétable, you may withdraw. You may go and inform your superior, the Lieutenant-Governor, that you have executed your commission; he in turn will inform his superior, the English Government; and they will inform their superior, M. Bonaparte."

Jersey, therefore, had to be left. When this contingency was still remote, Hugo had talked loftily of seeking a refuge beyond Europe, either in the United States or in some South American Republic, but when the moment came he resolved on a much more modest voyage. On October 31, accompanied by his younger son, he embarked on the packet-boat *Dispatch* for the adjoining island of Guernsey, to be followed a few days later by the rest of the family. After a voyage of an hour or so the steamer lay to off St. Peter, where, owing to the smallness of the harbour in those days, it was necessary to land passengers by means of a boat. The sea happened to be rough that day, and though the poet and his son found no difficulty in jumping into the boat, they had a brief spell of acute anxiety about the portmanteau in which Hugo carried all his MSS. Flung down by the sailors, "with no more concern than if it was a bale of cotton or a basket of fish," this precious baggage, as it rested for a few moments on the bow of the little boat dancing up and down on the waves, seemed as likely as not to be engulfed in the waters. However, it was soon safely stowed away in the bottom of the boat, which in a few strokes reached the landing-stage.

CHAPTER XV

1856–1862

The Guernsey epoch : *Les Contemplations* : Its characteristics : Hauteville House : Some of its contents : Madame Drouet in Guernsey : A literary family : *La Légende des Siècles* : Hugo's illness : The amnesty of 1859 : Hugo and the "fraternity of men" : The poor children's dinner : Arrangements for publishing *Les Misérables* : Reception of the work : Remarks on Bishop Myriel and others

BESIDES being its last and longest stage, Guernsey represents also what may be called the sentimental climax of exile. The change to a smaller and less populous island seems, in a way, to add to the poet's stature : the more solitary the background on which it is placed, the more impressively does the man's figure loom on our imagination. We are reminded—comparing the greater with the less—of Prometheus on his Caucasian crag, or St. John at Patmos, or Napoleon at St. Helena. Moreover, the circumstances under which Hugo went to Guernsey had been themselves sensational and attractive of considerable sympathy ; [1] and this sympathy was increased by the milder mood which, as time went on, supervened upon the first ferocity of exile. Hitherto the "personal quarrel" had been too much in evidence ; henceforth, though never appeased, it was relegated to a secondary place. Since by the inscrutable will of Providence "the Crime-Emperor" had been granted what was likely to be a long lease of

[1] Opinion in England was by no means unanimous in the matter. Meetings of protest against the expulsion from Jersey were held in London, Glasgow, and Newcastle, where Joseph Cowen denounced the action of the Government.

prosperity, to Providence must be left the determination of the lease. And so gradually the furious flood of individual hatred becomes diverted into various smaller streams of a more benign nature; and for the next fifteen years Hugo, in his character as a citizen of the world, appears less as the scourge of one tyrant than as the champion of all struggling causes—the advocate-general of all discontents in every quarter of the globe. And one still greater advantage must be credited to this phase of exile. With the advent of a more serene temper and a more lonely life, the poet found leisure to revert to his proper work of literature; so that Guernsey—besides the other books that were begun or ended there—will always be associated with the birth of Hugo's most ambitious poem and his most popular romance.

The first thing to be done was to bring out *Les Contemplations*, which, except for three pieces, had been completed before the departure from Jersey. Its publication in Paris (May 1856) was made possible by its wholly non-political character; while the consideration that no book of Hugo's had been produced in France for eleven years added to the interest with which the new work was awaited and the alacrity with which it was bought. As a specimen of the writer's lyric power and range the two volumes cannot be surpassed, though the diversity of their subjects makes it likely that what pleases one reader will offend another. Those, for example, to whom the section entitled *Pauca meae*—inspired by thoughts of the poet's lost Léopoldine—appeals strongly, will hardly take equal delight in the Anacreontic odes to "Mlle. Juliette" and other fair ladies which are grouped under the heading of *L'Ame en fleur*. And a good many who might appreciate the merits of each species separately have found some incongruity in the juxtaposition of two such different kinds of "love." However, that is only a matter of taste; and there is no accounting for taste—

or for the absence of it.[1] Certain it is that *Les Contemplations*—apart from the theme of "tout conjugue le verbe aimer"—contains a great deal of Hugo's most beautiful verse, together with many indications of that growing desire for "the service of man" which distinguishes the writer of *Aujourd'hui* from him of *Autrefois*. The concluding part—a development of that "system of cosmogony" we have heard about in the *Letters* and the *Journal*—might well have been dispensed with. *Ce que dit la Bouche d'Ombre*, if it does not deserve so severe an epithet as "puerile," is at any rate overburdened with that abstruse mysticism which became an increasing defect of the poet's later style. It is neither very new nor very illuminating, this elaboration of the theory of metempsychosis; it is only an obscuration of the obscure.

Another feature of the later Hugo, first conspicuous in *Les Contemplations*, is the collocation of two substantives without any connecting preposition—an innovation much stranger, of course, to French ears than to English,[2] which must be included among those "liberations of language" on which the poet prided himself in his triumphant *Réponse à un acte d'accusation*, where he speaks of having "demolished the Bastille of rhymes," "made the Muses dance the 'Carmagnole,'" "invested the old dictionary with a red cap," and so forth; claiming, in short, to have been "the Danton and the Robespierre of the literary Revolution." In this *Réponse*, by the way, occur several instances of the double substantive—a fact which argues strongly against its having been written,

[1] It is only fair to say that the juxtaposition is not very glaring; *L'Ame en fleur* and *Pauca meae* are separated by an intervening section, as also by the cardinal distinction between "Then" and "Now."

[2] One or two stray examples had occurred before this, *e.g. le pirate empereur*; but here they are plentiful: *l'homme spectre*; *la terre vision*; *les mots monstres*; *la branche destin*; *la cage césure*; &c. &c. Later on we shall have the well-known designation of Paris as *la ville lumière*.

as it professes, in 1834, at which date the usage in question is found in none of the poet's writings. We have seen before now how coolly Hugo manipulated dates to suit his convenience, and there seems little doubt that in this case we should read 1854 instead of 1834. Nor is this the only instance of ante-dating which may be found in *Les Contemplations,* the object always being to imply that the writer's present opinions were famed a long while ago.

The reception of the book was enthusiastic, its sale most satisfactory : seldom has a poet found his "contemplations" so profitable. And the money was wanted for a special purpose. Realising now that his exile might last indefinitely, Hugo had decided to make himself a permanent home. It was a question not only of comfort but of security. By becoming a resident and an owner of property in Guernsey, instead of a mere lodger, he would be less liable to molestation by the French Government. It is true that, after what had happened, there was something comical in his seeking refuge from persecution by constituting himself a subject of Queen Victoria ; at the same time, by doing so, he was practically binding himself to be of good behaviour. That is how and why Hugo became the proprietor of Hauteville House, which he purchased (on May 18, 1856) for a sum equivalent to £1000, half of which was paid down and the balance by instalments. Into this house he moved at the end of 1856 ; but the move was only the beginning of a long process of furnishing and decoration which, being conducted with ideal leisureliness, was not complete for quite three years. In all this work the poet found the keenest interest and pleasure. Many bits of furniture and ornaments he picked up in the island, others he bought in Belgium and Holland. Planning and directing all details, he combined in himself the functions of architect, decorator, and workman—designing, carving, painting, with all that æsthetic fancy and that fondness for weird effects

which characterised him in art and craft; so that Hauteville House might well be considered as one of Hugo's "works," and not the least successful of them. Writing to George Sand, just after he had taken possession, he says: "I have bought a little crib here with the first two editions of *Les Contemplations*. When I have got it into shape, you must come over and stay with us. I think I shall call it 'Liberty Hall.'"

And to Jules Janin, a little later: "I must tell you that I am engaged in—so to speak—constructing a house. As I have no longer a country, I want to be sure at least of a roof over my head. . . . Curiously enough, it is literature which supplies me with the funds for this experiment. For the said house—with its garden and all the rest—from foundation to roof, will be paid for by *Les Contemplations*. Some day, when you have time to waste for our benefit, you—who liked the poems so much—must come and see what they have produced."

And that is a visit which every student of Hugo inclines to make. Not that there is any need at this date to retell, with inventorial precision, the oft-told treasures of "H.H." (so the letters are commonly headed), familiar as these have become through manifold descriptions, photographs, pictorial postcards, and what not? Grey and commonplace outside, within, a fairy palace, the owner of which had—one would say—spent his life as an amateur of old oak tapestry and china. A few of its contents had, no doubt, been saved from the wreck of the Place Royale, but not enough to diminish our wonder at the combination of industry, good fortune, and good taste which enabled Hugo, during the years of his exile, to amass—presumably at small cost—a multitude of curios such as would be difficult to pick up nowadays except on rare occasions and at fancy prices. Imagine the expert's delight at the walls and ceiling of the "Red Drawing-Room" covered with tapestry originally worked for Queen Christina of

Sweden, or the screen embroidered by Madame de Pompadour, or the four gilded statues which came from the Palace of the Doges, or the ivory-inlaid table which was once the property of Charles II. of England. Equally precious are the two Chinese vases standing on cabinets at either side of the entrance to the *Salon Bleu ;* in the smoking-room the antique Oriental lantern which hangs from the ceiling ; in the dining-room the china stand with three salt-cellars on top, made by a pupil of Michael Angelo, and so valuable that it is cemented on to the tiles. Even more interesting are those objects in which we can see either the poet's own handiwork or evidence of his particular tastes. Among the first may be noted the black and white drawings on the walls of the billiard-room, inscriptions in French or Latin *passim,* the engraving of " Nox, Mors, Lux " on the woodwork of the great four-poster bed in that part of the Oak Gallery (on the second floor) which is called " The Garibaldi Room," because it was set apart for a long-expected, though never realised, visit from the Italian patriot. Among signs of the constant bent of Hugo's thoughts, nothing is more characteristic than the grotesque little ivory head—also in the Garibaldi Room —one side of which is all life and smiles, the other a skeleton ; or the statuette over the dining-room mantel-piece of Our Lady and Child, secularised by the poet's later fancy into Liberty holding the People, with this inscription, " Libertas populum, populus dum sustinet orbem " ; or finally, the famous " Sella patrum defunctorum "—that stately sixteenth-century chair which stands, chained off, in the window recess of the dining-room, to be occupied at meal-times by the spirits of those fondly imagined and dearly loved ancestors whose reality was, by Hugo's pronouncement, accepted as a dogma of household faith. And then, above all this—above the first floor with its *salons* and the second floor with its Oak Gallery—right at the top of the house, the Master had made his own sanctum. He was always

fond of heights; the nearer the sky, the more he felt himself at home. And so he had built on to the roof an addition which he called "The Look-Out"—a sort of glass studio affording a magnificent view on all sides and divided into two compartments, the smaller of which—hardly more spacious than a ship's cabin—was the poet's bedroom, while the larger served as his study. Here, every day, having risen early, he wrote steadily for four or five hours, as a rule standing at a plain upright desk and clothed in a red dressing-gown. Often he paced about engrossed in thought, and his figure might thus be seen by passers-by on the road; whence no doubt arose the inveterate Guernsey tradition that M. Hugo was in the habit, at an early hour every morning, of taking his bath on the roof of his house.

Such was Hugo's home, such in the main it still is. Some few of its treasures have been removed to the Hugo Museum in the Place des Vosges, but otherwise it remains as when the poet lived there. Unoccupied except for occasional visits from one or other of the two grandchildren whose property it is, the place is generally in charge of a caretaker, and is preserved with scrupulous order and cleanliness.

Life in Guernsey was even quieter than in the other island. As far as the people of the place were concerned, the Hugos kept mostly to themselves. Nor did they trouble much to conciliate opinion, if it be true—as stated—that while patronising a local concert one evening (in 1857), Hugo, seated in the front row of chairs, ostentatiously declined to follow the custom of standing up when "God save the Queen" was played at the end of the performance, saying it was against his principles to recognise crowned heads. Occupied during the first three years in the arrangement of Hauteville House and in his literary work, the poet, though his family and friends went and came, had himself no thought of leaving his island, the picturesque grandeur of which appealed to him more than the softer

prettiness of Jersey. Moreover, he had gathered round him all that was necessary to his life. We hear little of Juliette during the Jersey period, when her visits were only occasional, but now she was permanently established in a little house which Hugo bought and furnished for her, close to his own. Every one understood and accepted the position; no one talked about it. Its explanation may be found in the "superior man" theory so engagingly announced by Alfred Asseline, who was equally a friend of Hugo and of his wife. "Superior men," he writes (in *Victor Hugo Intime*), "have the privilege of imposing on the world and on society a friend—*the* friend (*l'amie*) who is indispensable to them." Or, as Chateaubriand had said of a famous *liaison:* "Il faut tenir bon pour que les illégitimités deviennent des légitimités." And so "Madame Drouet"—as she was now always called—became an admitted *annexe* of Hauteville House. Hugo visited her with a certain formality; the young Hugos treated her as a relative and were often in and out of her house; and she behaved, by all accounts, with commendable tact, recognising that the poet's wife and family had the first claim on him, and herself accepting a subordinate position.

Thus everything seemed ordered for the best, and the wheels went round with the least possible amount of friction. In accordance with Hugo's maxim, "Peu de travail ennuie, beaucoup de travail amuse," work, and plenty of it, was the order of the day with every inmate of Hauteville House. "If only our exile lasts long enough," wrote François-Victor, "we shall, between us, necessitate the addition of a new wing to the Bibliothèque Nationale." While the elder son was writing novels (*La Bohème dorée, L'Oiseau bleu,* &c.), the younger was engrossed in his great task of translating Shakespeare, in the course of which he paid a visit, accompanied by Asseline, to Stratford-on-Avon. Mme. Hugo, for her part, was still busy writing *Hugo*

raconté from her husband's notes or dictation ; and the Master himself, up in his "Look-Out," divided his time between the completion of *Les Misérables* and a new work of poetry which he intended at first to call *Petites Epopées*. This title was subordinated eventually to the grander and more comprehensive *La Légende des Siècles*, which was itself an emendation of *La Légende Humaine*—a suggestion abandoned because of its similarity to Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*. And doubtless the larger name was the more convenient ; for though in this collection there are several "miniature epics" proper—and these the best parts of the book—(*Ratbert, Eviradnus, Le Petit Roi de Galice, Aymerillot*, &c.), it was by no means the poet's idea to limit himself to that gentle shadow of history which is called legend. He could not forget that he was a preacher and a prophet as well as a poet, and that his business was, as he says in the Preface, to deal with the "Absolute and the Infinite" as well as with the "Relative and the Limited" —with the present and future no less than with the past.

All these big words meant a very vague and indefinite plan, capricious, full of gaps, quite different from the ship-shape orderliness which had hitherto marked Hugo's work. But there was about it a compensating freedom with which no lover of poetry need quarrel. Those who can remember the appearance (September 1859) of the first series of *La Légende des Siècles*, have told us with what a thrill of eager anticipation they opened it—to be surprised, perhaps, but not disappointed. For finding themselves in face of what was, regarded as a scheme, mysterious, intangible, beyond the range of criticism if not of comprehension, they naturally tended towards appreciation of the parts separately without worrying about the connection of these with the whole ; and so they were able to recognise all the power and charm of inspirations derived from such various sources as the Bible (*La Conscience, Première*

Rencontre du Christ avec le Tombeau, &c.), northern antiquity (*Le Parricide*), the pagan Renaissance (*Le Satyre*), the humble life of every day (*Les Pauvres Gens*).

Before *La Légende des Siècles* was published, the family at Hauteville House had for some time been oppressed by a new and serious anxiety. Hitherto Hugo had been the most robust of men ; except for the weakness of the eyes, referred to at an earlier date, there is no record of his ever having suffered from illness of any sort. But in the course of 1858 he developed a malady of the throat grave enough eventually to involve a journey to London in order to consult a French doctor there. There had been a trifling operation, but this was followed by a long slow period of convalescence, during which the patient, debarred from his usual amount of food and exercise, was far below himself alike in health and in spirits. Sometimes he even felt that he would never be well again. "I still have a certain amount of discomfort in the throat," he writes to Paul Meurice in February 1861 ; "change of air, I am told, is what will do me most good. . . . I pray God that He will allow me to finish what I have begun."

Happily, in time, there was a full recovery ; but one effect of the illness was to modify Hugo's intention of remaining fixed in Guernsey. On medical advice, and at first reluctantly, he went for a change to Brussels (where all trace of ill-feeling had long since disappeared) ; soon the habit grew upon him, and during the last ten years of his exile he made a practice of spending three or four months of each summer away from Guernsey—on the Rhine, in Belgium, or in Holland. At the time when he first adopted this manner of life he might, had he so chosen, have returned to his native country. In 1859 Louis Napoléon celebrated his victories of Magenta and Solferino by proclaiming a general amnesty for all political offenders. Hugo's reply was a scornful defiance : "No one will suppose that I personally can take any

notice of the thing called an 'amnesty.' In the present condition of France, protest—absolute, inflexible, eternal protest—that is my duty. True to the engagement I have made with my conscience, I shall share to the end the exile of Liberty. When Liberty returns, I shall return!"

The regret which Hugo felt at having to forego his return was probably balanced by his satisfaction at being able to strike so fine an attitude.[1] A good deal of unnecessary speculation has been wasted over his motives: in truth, after all he had said and written against Napoleon III.—especially after the final words of *Les Châtiments*—it was impossible for any man of ordinary self-esteem to act otherwise. And Hugo was a man of more than ordinary self-esteem, exasperated by the good-natured tolerance with which his enemy had endured his diatribes. Not for a moment could he think of eating humble pie by accepting an amnesty which (in a letter to George Sand) he speaks of as "the crowning insolence of *ce malheureux réussisseur*." So he remained where he was, no longer technically an outlaw (*proscrit*), but a voluntary exile for the sake of conscience, self-respect, self-esteem—which you will.

The position was one by which his influence gained rather than lost; for no one could accuse him of not being sincere and disinterested. In his capacity as mentor to the world he became now a more active force in public affairs than at any former period of his career. Already, in 1856, in reply to an appeal from Mazzini for "a word" which might counteract monarchic tendencies in Italy, he had addressed to the Italians a great many words, the substance of which was to urge them to "Agitate! Agitate! No sleep, no apathy, no truce!" In June

[1] We cannot doubt that the regret was very real, even though Hugo may have tried sometimes to disguise it by an assumed indifference; as when, talking to a friend in Brussels, he is reported to have said: "I have no need of Paris. After all, what is Paris? It is the Rue de Rivoli, and I detest the Rue de Rivoli."

1860 he went by special invitation to Jersey—where bygones were now bygones—to address a large meeting on behalf of a subscription for Garibaldi, and he ended his speech with a warning to all tyrants that it was vain for them to try and "check a world which God had hurled into the light." A year later he assured the Italian Reform Committee that the day was at hand when "frontiers will disappear and wars will cease in the fraternity of men: that great day when there shall be one country only—*la patrie humaine*." In 1862 the Genevan Republic, revising its Constitution, sought his advice, and, much to his satisfaction, abolished capital punishment. Less successfully his voice was raised in imploring the Russian soldiers not to fight against their brothers, the Poles; while to Garibaldi, who wrote to him from Caprera (1863) saying that he needed a million muskets for Italy, his reply—enclosing a subscription—was: "You need a million arms, a million hearts, a million souls. You need the great uprising of the nations—it will come!"

Nor were Hugo's interests confined to Europe alone. He condemned as brigandage the joint intervention of France and England in China and the burning of the Summer Palace. To the Mexicans he counselled resistance against the interference of Napoleon. To the United States he appealed against the execution of John Brown, and great was his sorrow at the failure of this appeal. He noticed that the "murder" of John Brown took place on December 2—an ill-omened day; but the bitterness of it was that a "Republic has done this thing. From kings crimes are to be expected, but the crime of a People is too hard to bear."[1] And he foresaw, in common with many others, the approaching split between the North and

[1] The memory of this martyr in the cause of humanity was always revered by Hugo. He made a drawing of John Brown hanging from the scaffold, and underneath he wrote the words: "Pro Christo, sicut Christus!"

South on the question of slavery. On that subject, and on the oppression of black by white in general, his feelings were naturally and creditably strong. From far Haiti a letter reached him—from a gentleman of colour, the editor of a local paper, to whom Hugo's reply was so encouraging—and at the same time so very Hugoesque—that it must be quoted: "Your letter moves me. You are a noble specimen of black humanity so long down-trodden. Since there is only one God, one Father, we are all brothers. There are on the earth neither black men nor white men: there are souls. You are one. Before God all souls are white."

This spirit of world-wide fraternity—genuine enough in spite of a manner of expression which often raises a smile—received a practical illustration nearer home when Hugo started, in 1861, the custom of giving a weekly dinner to some of the poorest children of Guernsey. His sincere fondness for the young—though, like other of his good deeds, tinged by just a little too much parade—must be always acknowledged to his credit. Years before this, in a Parliamentary debate on an Education Bill, he had said finely: "We have heard in this discussion a great deal about the 'rights of the parent,' but there is another thing to be considered—'the rights of the child.'" And for those simple words—which have not yet lost their point—we feel that we can pardon him many of his rhetorical inanities. Quite sensibly he maintained that the physical and moral welfare of the young go hand in hand, and that to brighten their lives—besides being a duty in itself—is the surest way to make them into good and useful citizens. And so every Thursday a certain number of these little ones were invited to Hauteville House, where they were given a generous meal, allowed to play in the garden, and sent home with presents. On these occasions, to emphasise the idea of brotherhood and equality, the poet himself and his family waited on their guests. At first there were only ten or a dozen, but they soon grew to

three or four times that number ; and the idea—more novel than now—was taken up and put in practice by public and private efforts in London and other large towns. Hugo's correspondence shows that he was justified in claiming to have set an example.

And now, to sum up, as it were, all this sympathy with his fellow-creatures, came his great tableau of suffering humanity. The year 1861 was almost wholly occupied in finishing *Les Misérables* and arranging for its production. "It takes me nearly as long to publish a book as to write one," the poet once said. But the remark would not apply in this case, for *Les Misérables* had been on the stocks since 1846, and in those fifteen years had been considerably affected, in design and execution, by the development of its author's opinions. The work had grown, too, to an uncontemplated size, and the fair-copying of it for the printers was a task that occupied Mme. Drouet, Mme. Chenay (Hugo's sister-in-law), and another lady for several weeks. In May 1861 Hugo finished it at Brussels, and went over to stay at Mont-Saint-Jean for the purpose of writing on the spot the Waterloo part which was to come in Volume III. At Brussels, also, he entered into treaty with the publisher Lacroix, the eventual result of which was that the romance was to be produced in ten volumes by instalments, and was to appear simultaneously in Paris, Brussels, London, Leipzig, Milan, Madrid, Pesth, and Rotterdam. Accordingly the first portion—*Fantine*—was published on April 3, 1862, and the concluding portion—*Jean Valjean*—on June 30.

One need not dilate on its instant and world-wide popularity : with *Les Misérables* Hugo reached the people as he had never reached them before. Every one was reading and talking of the book. Even in the distant strife of the American Civil War the soldiers over their camp-fires were found eagerly perusing its pages and discussing its soon familiar characters—Bishop Myriel and Jean Valjean, Cosette

and Marius, Javert and Gavroche. To a friend in Brussels, just after the book was finished, Hugo had said: "Dante made a hell with poetry; I have tried to make one with reality." The same idea is expressed in the Preface of *Les Misérables*, where also the practical object of doing good by calling attention to the unfair pressure of laws and customs is distinctly stated. Primarily therefore it was a novel with a purpose, and as such excited ardent partisanship. On the one side were those who acclaimed it as the "Gospel of the Poor," and among these were many ministers of religion who wrote to Hugo that they would gladly, if permitted, read it from their pulpits; on the other were those who denounced the book as subversive of religion and order, or who—like Lamartine—deprecated its tendency as "anti-social." Such alarms would not be shared to-day. We have travelled a long way since then, and Hugo's romance—so far as it did more than arouse transitory emotions—can hardly have been anything but beneficial: by reminding comfortable people that there are others, and that the official handling of poverty and crime, whether by Church or State, leaves a good deal to be desired.

And the professedly practical object of the book exempts it also from a comparison it could ill endure, as a work of art, with *Notre Dame*. Like *La Légende des Siècles*, *Les Misérables* must be judged in its parts—as a series of moving scenes, many of which exhibit their author at his very highest capacity of poetic imagination and narrative power, and many of which might be removed without interference with the course of the story. But the digressions of genius are easily pardoned, even though they amount, as in this case, to at least a quarter of the whole.[1] In any case the first portion of the book is free from this reproach—the story of the saintly

[1] It was calculated by a critic that out of the 2783 pages which in the original edition composed the last eight volumes no fewer than 955 were taken up with digressions.

Bishop and of the long cruel struggle between good and evil in the soul of Jean Valjean ; and to this portion a special interest belongs. Amazed indeed were the critics when these two volumes appeared : how could this be the work of Victor Hugo, who for years past had been denouncing bishops and priests, and who in *Les Châtiments* had accumulated on the whole ecclesiastical hierarchy every epithet of abuse and contempt ? They were unaware at first that the "Bishop's Manuscript" (so it was originally called) had been written before the eventful years 1848–1851, and that the author was naturally disinclined to waste it. At the same time it is obvious, as M. Biré has argued, that Hugo did not leave these pages quite in their first form. He felt the necessity of accommodating more or less his earlier and later opinions, and for this purpose he "retouched" —as painters say. The good Bishop, it will be remembered, is by no means orthodox in his opinions; otherwise how could he be so good ? He is, too, so full of love for every living thing that he will step out of his path to avoid hurting an ant or a snail ; and this amiable quality seems naturally connected with the metempsychical ideas developed by Hugo when he was writing *Les Contemplations,* and often illustrated in that work. And then, of such unexampled tolerance and open-mindedness is this Bishop that being present at the death-bed of an old Republican—an ex-member of the Convention of 1793, who had voted for the death of Marie Antoinette—he listens, with acquiescence, to this man's defence of the Revolutionary Tribunal and the Reign of Terror, and ends by falling on his knees to ask a dying blessing from the disciple of Marat and Robespierre,

All this shows Bishop Myriel certainly far removed from the category of ordinary bishops, and probably a long way from the original conception of his character. It must be observed, however, that these "retouchings"—the "secular passport" (as M. Biré calls them) to a book which in parts seems a super-

fluously violent recantation of once-cherished ideas—are only a matter of conjecture and may easily be exaggerated.[1] All we can be sure of is that the Hugo of 1862 was much more inclined than he of 1846 to find the spirit of Christianity in a character not acceptable at all points to its official representatives. The Bishop, by the way, had sufficient resemblance to a well-known prelate—the late Monseigneur de Miollis, Bishop of Digne—to elicit a protest from a relative against what the author had invented about him. Nor was he the only personage for whom models were discovered. It is undeniable that Hugo's own early vicissitudes were partly reproduced in those of Marius, while General Hugo was the prototype of Marius' father, Baron Pontmercy. M. Gillenormand represents the Royalist relatives of the poet's mother, and Sister Simplice was a cousin who had adopted the religious life. The first idea of Fantine Hugo has connected (in *Choses Vues*) with an incident that befell him in the street one day. As to the immortal types of Javert and Gavroche, their origin defies identification, though some of their adventures—and those of other characters—have been noted as possibly suggested by bits of Balzac, Eugène Sue, Alexandre Dumas. But why linger over these trifling details? Simply to postpone the inevitable truism that *Les Misérables* is a work of genius.

[1] In the recently published "Carnets" of Victor Hugo (*Les Annales*, January 9, 1910) we find this entry referring to the year 1860: "I have spent seven months in bringing meditation and light to bear on the whole work as it presents itself to my mind, in order that there may be absolute unity between what I wrote twelve years ago and what I am about to write to-day."

CHAPTER XVI

1862–1868

The Brussels banquet : Back in Guernsey : Hugo's money and his philanthropy : Good works among the poor : *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie* : Hugo on Shakespeare : *Chansons des Rues et des Bois* : *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* : Hugo as a Chauvinist : Revival of *Hernani* in Paris : Prohibition of *Ruy Blas* : The "Voice" on public affairs : *Hernani* played in Guernsey : Domestic events : Death of Madame Hugo

It was natural that so great a success as *Les Misérables* should receive a public celebration ; hence the Brussels banquet of September 16, 1862, organised by the firm of Lacroix, and attended by journalists and other men of letters from all countries. Hugo, though the guest of the evening, presided ; on his right sat the Mayor of Brussels, on his left the President of the Chamber. The Hugo family were there, including Mme. Drouet, between whom and Mme. Hugo an amicable toast was interchanged. After various speeches—by Louis Blanc, Champfleury, Théodore de Banville, among many others—the guest of the evening delivered a great oration on the power of the Press, which, in an elaborately developed image, he described as the "sacred locomotive of Progress, drawing the human race from the long dark tunnel of six thousand years into the sunshine of Liberty." In short, everything went admirably ; and then Hugo—who had previously been staying at The Hague—returned to his "rock." He had good reason to be pleased with the year 1862, for his health was now restored, and his glory and his means augmented. There is a distinct note of satisfaction in

a letter written about this time to a friend who had evidently asked for particulars of his Guernsey life.

"I am living here with my wife and family in a house which I have bought and which makes me inviolable: no fourth exile can overtake me here. . . . I have around me dogs, birds, flowers; next year I hope to get a horse and trap. My fortune, almost destroyed by the *coup d'état*, has been somewhat repaired by *Les Misérables*. I rise early, and go to bed early. I work all day, and taking a walk along the seashore I find, for the purpose of writing, a sort of natural *fauteuil* in the rock at a delightful spot called Firmain Bay. I do *not* read the 740 articles attacking me that have appeared in the last few months (my publishers have counted them) in the Catholic newspapers of Belgium, Italy, Austria, and Spain. I am very fond of the honest hard-working folk around me, and I believe that they are rather fond of me. I do not smoke; I eat roast beef like an Englishman and drink beer like a German. Yet all this does not prevent *La España*—a clerical paper of Madrid—from declaring that Victor Hugo does not exist and that the real author of *Les Misérables* is one called Satan."

It will be noticed that the writer of this letter refers to the improvement of his financial position. That was not the least important result of Hugo's widely circulated novel. Embarrassed he had undoubtedly been in the early years of his exile, but things had begun to mend with *Les Contemplations*, and now with *Les Misérables* a period of affluence was reached. During the rest of his life the money was always rolling in: prudently invested—in British, Belgian, or Dutch securities—it produced a reliable income, and Hugo, thus situated, was able to do more for other people than hitherto. On this delicate subject it may be said at once that "avarice" and "meanness," which his enemies have imputed to him, are expressions rather too harsh to be justified in face of the evidence supplied by his letters

and diaries. Instances can, no doubt, be quoted of his refusing or evading requests for help; but it must be remembered that a man who had proclaimed so widely his philanthropic spirit was bound to receive many more appeals than he could possibly respond to. What can justly be said is that Hugo exercised a shrewd and discriminating charity, that he minutely noted all such disbursements, and that he preferred to distribute his benefactions in a variety of small and sometimes fanciful ways rather than in substantial sums for obvious objects. The question, of course, is entirely relative to resources, and of these we can never be quite sure. For the poet, exaggerating in most things, always tended to minimise his income. There was no reason why he should make any statements at all on the subject: most people would ignore as a mere impertinence remarks or speculations about the amount of their earnings. Not so Hugo, who occasionally feels the need of explaining,[1] and in explaining—after his fashion—misrepresents. It is pretty safe to conclude that he never penalised himself by his charities, that he never—so to say—under-estimated the value of a sixpence or forgot the sound principle that six separate pennies to six separate persons are more effective (in both senses) than a sixpence which goes bang on one

[1] In a letter of 1868 (to a newspaper called *Le Phare de la Loire*) Hugo, indignant at some overstatement of his income, gives the following details: "I have (1) from shares in the Banque Nationale of Belgium, 35,000 francs; (2) from British Consols, 12,500 francs; (3) from my salary as a Member of the Institute, 1000 francs; total, 48,500 francs. Out of this I pay by family arrangements 29,500 francs, and I give every year in charities 7000 francs. Thus my present income is 12,000 francs." In spite of its display of frankness, this letter tells us very little. To begin with, it applies only to money already invested at the time, without taking account of what was constantly coming in and available either for use or for further investment. And then, what are "family arrangements"? Do they include all household expenses? And what are "charities"? Do they cover subscriptions for any public purpose? If so, Hugo—other expenses paid—would have £500 a year of pocket-money.

person. Munificent or open-handed he can hardly be called; but, as he satisfied his own conscience, we may freely admit that in one way or another he did a creditable amount of giving, and also that he increased the moral value of his gifts by the personal attention he bestowed on individual cases.

This conclusion may be fortified by some evidence. Political exiles, of whatever nationality, Hugo was always disposed to help. There were only a few of these in Guernsey itself, and their number was naturally reduced as time went on: some had died, the majority took advantage of the amnesty of 1859. But during the early years of the exile we hear a good deal about the "Caisse des Proscrits," a fund for the relief of indigent refugees which Hugo promoted and managed. Besides this, his house and table were open to sundry unfortunates whom he supported or assisted. Typical of these was the often-mentioned Hennat de Kesler,[1] an ex-journalist who, since the *coup d'état*, had earned a precarious living by teaching languages. Kesler lodged elsewhere, but his place was always laid, and generally filled, at Hugo's board—a hospitality which he repaid by boundless admiration for the great man and all his works. Of him it is recorded that one day, discussing with Hugo a point in *Les Misérables*, in the heat of his enthusiasm he exclaimed: "Why, Victor Hugo, you do not understand that book!"

Nor must we omit from the Guernsey life the poet's pleasant relations with his humble neighbours. Besides the Poor Children's Dinner, which grew to be the most extensive of Hugo's charities, Hauteville House soon became the centre of various acts of benevolence. Perhaps it is a bazaar which Mme. Hugo has got up in order to found a *crèche*, and to which her husband contributes his books or autographs; or else the

[1] Kesler died in Guernsey in 1870. Hugo paid the expenses of his illness and of his funeral and bought the grave in which he was interred.

question is of food, coals, or medicine for poor and ailing people. On such matters the Diary contains frequent entries. We find very precise instructions to Marie, the cook, on dealing with applications for relief, as thus: "Bread is to be given to all who ask for it, but not money—without first consulting me. (Money is easily transformed into gin.) All requests for work are to be at once referred to me, and employment is to be given by preference to old people, wherever possible: no distinction to be made between Catholics and Protestants. . . . Soup and meat every week to the old fellow who describes himself as a Catholic when he is calling on Abbé Lemenant, and as a Republican when he comes here. He is eighty years of age. . . . Cod liver oil to be bought for any children who need it, on the doctor's certificate." And so on—details which represent transactions equally agreeable no doubt to giver and recipient.[1] For Hugo, as we have before suggested, was not unconscious of his merits; in further proof of which see this entry (January 1, 1866): "To-day I put on my overcoat which has been turned. 'Why,' people asked me, 'do you wear out your old clothes in this way?' 'Because,' I replied, 'I prefer to give to the poor the money that my new clothes would cost.'"

Yet while for these reasons the master of Hauteville House was deservedly popular, his presence in the island was always something of a mystery to the simpler inhabitants. Vaguely they imagined him to be a competitor for the French throne who was being kept out of his rights by Napoleon. In the event of war between

[1] Equal method and particularity characterise Hugo's benefactions outside the island. To Meurice he writes that he desires 15 francs a month to be paid to an old woman whom he remembers as a dresser at one of the theatres. Or, again, a sergeant in a regiment quartered at Besançon (Hugo's native town) had lost 200 francs which belonged to his company; if he could not replace this sum he would be cashiered. Hugo sends it to him, after first ascertaining from his captain that he was a man of good character.

France and England they felt sure that one of the first operations would be a French invasion of Guernsey for the purpose of seizing Victor Hugo: if so, well—let them come! Opinions on this point are crystallised in the remarks of Blick the barber, whose services the poet employed daily. "I suppose, sir," said Blick in a confidential whisper, "that when you are on the throne you will be shaved *twice* a day." "No, Blick," replied Hugo, "I shall never be on the throne, and I shall never be shaved twice a day."

Among the islanders no class interested the poet so much as the seafaring men—those "toilers of the deep" to whom he will presently devote a great romance. But, before that, one or two other books have to be mentioned. First, the notorious *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*, which (produced in the way we have described and published in 1863) has been so often referred to in the story of Hugo's early life—it only extends to 1843—that nothing further remains to be said about it. Yes, one thing. To give the book to the world under that name was a considerable fraud; for, though all Hugo's friends and many others knew who had written it and how it had been written, the general public accepted this pseudo-biography in good faith as the record of an independent witness, and continued so to accept it—probably until it was included by Hugo in the definitive edition of his works. That was always its proper place, just as its proper title would have been "Victor Hugo described by himself"—described, that is, as he desired to appear to the world. For many years now—ever since M. Biré's first Hugo book—the true character of *Victor Hugo raconté* has been recognised: it retains, however, a certain interest as a storehouse of more or less wilful inaccuracies. As to Mme. Hugo, whose part in the work was only that of an amanuensis, we can but admire the loyalty with which she lent herself to recording what (in a rather touching

letter to Emile de Girardin[1]) she calls "the facts of my husband's great and sorely tried life." Few husbands, we imagine—even in domestic conditions less delicate than those of Victor Hugo—would find in their wives such unquestioning helpers of their fame.

The next of Hugo's books was also, in a way, a family affair: at any rate it was primarily designed as a send-off to his son's translation of Shakespeare's works, the completion of which was to appear during 1864—the three-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. In the celebration of that year Hugo took much interest, though he considered that the raising of funds by public subscription was a feeble and inadequate method: the proper thing, he says, would have been the passing of an Act by the British Parliament. But he subscribed himself (£5) and he also accepted with pleasure the presidency of a French committee formed to organise a Shakepeare banquet in Paris—a complimentary position, of course, for he could not have been present in person. In fact, the banquet did not take place, being prohibited by the French Government as likely to prove an occasion for manifestations. To return, however, to the book—*William Shakespeare*, by Victor Hugo, in spite of its promising title, has no value for students of the English poet. If any one has the curiosity to open it he will find a little—a very little—about Shakespeare, and a great deal about Genius in general and its fourteen embodiments whose names are Homer, Job, Æschylus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Lucretius, Juvenal, Tacitus, St. Paul, St. John, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare. If this list seems somewhat arbitrary, an examination of the book will soon reveal the principle of selection. Do we wonder, for example,

[1] It is curious that in this same letter Mme. Hugo asks Girardin for a loan of 500 francs on the security of the book (not yet completed). She wanted the money at once, she explains, in order to give her daughter Adèle a change by taking her on a visit to England. Were Hugo's charities, we wonder, so absorbent that he could not produce £20 for his wife?

at finding Juvenal included—a talented writer certainly, but hardly entitled to a one-fourteenth share of the world's genius ? But it must be remembered not only that Juvenal wrote the *Satires*, but—which is more important—that Victor Hugo wrote *Les Châtiments*. Ezekiel, again, is "the demagogue of the Bible," the "prophet of Progress," and the inference is obvious. As to St. Paul, he owes his position not to his theology but to the fact that he journeyed on the road to Damascus—a parallel which has been explained before. And so with the rest. Every one of these fourteen "giants of the human intellect" will be found to be by implication in some way or other a forerunner of the particular genius of the nineteenth century. After all, what was more reasonable than that Victor Hugo, knowing his own genius, should also discover his affinities with the great men of the past ? And as he could hardly say so directly or entitle his book "On Genius, with some remarks by its present possessor," he might just as well call it *William Shakespeare* as anything else. Besides, he is not greedy. In one of his letters about this time we find : "Art is not perfectible : that is its greatness and its eternity. You cannot surpass genius, but you may equal it : there is room for all."

The substance of *William Shakespeare* was, in brief, that "Genius is an entity like Nature and must be accepted as it stands : it is open to admiration, but it is above criticism." From which statement we can easily frame the simple and flawless syllogism which expressed Hugo's attitude towards all who differed from him. But the public, it seems, was not much attracted by those theorisings : at any rate the book fell very flat. Fortunately the poet was at hand to replace the philosopher, and close on the Shakespeare work followed *Chansons des Rues et des Bois* (1865)—a collection in the author's early and less didactic style, a recrudescence of youth and of the days when love was young and frisky, an outbreak of skittishness which to some people seemed

indecorous in an elderly gentlemen of sixty-three. But Hugo was nothing if not vital. Some politics of course there must be, for the poet by this time could not mention even a petticoat without dragging in a disparagement of monarchy or manufacturing a date to show that he had been at heart a Republican from his cradle. And then, there is rather too much of it all. For these are not the traditional species of *chanson*—terse, lively, varied—the *chanson* of Béranger; but lengthy pieces, cast in an eternal series of quatrains, which after two or three hundred pages tend to monotony.

If their reception was only lukewarm the reason no doubt was, partly, because what people expected and wanted just now from the author of *Les Misérables* was another romance. They had not long to wait. In the following year (1866) *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* was published. As splendid a theme as could be imagined is this of the strong simple sailor who, for the love of a maiden, undertakes a giant struggle with the fury of the waves and the monsters of the deep, victorious at last only to find all his toil in vain and to die blessing the woman who has injured him. Fiction presents no finer or more pathetic figure than that of Gilliatt. And indeed it needs all our interest in the fortunes of this man to carry us over the mountainous digressions and technicalities which overlay the story. Display of erudition was always one of Hugo's foibles, even as far back as the time of *Notre Dame;* and here it reaches a climax. What with its account of the animal and vegetable life of the sea, with its details of carpentry, of engineering, of navigation—the book positively bulges with omniscience. The description of a storm, magnificent though it be, hardly requires eighty pages: the manœuvres by which Gilliatt effects the salvage of the *Durande's* engines form nothing less than a treatise on mechanics. We feel pretty sure that the Guernsey sailor men could not have supplied so much knowledge,

and that technical dictionaries must have been as essential for writing the book as they are for reading it. There are some, of course, to whom all this plethoric information seems an admirable *tour de force*, and who hold—as Hugo himself would have said—that the prodigality of Genius must be accepted like the prodigality of Nature; but for most of us the story, shortened by half and simplified where it is most elaborate, would have been more impressive and might easily, in that guise, have been reckoned as Hugo's masterpiece. Even as it is *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* is a great book, and it met with a deserved success. "Four thousand copies" (wrote Paul Meurice from Paris) "have been sold here in two days." Before its publication Hugo had been besieged with offers from newspapers for the right to publish it first *en feuilleton*. The *Gaulois* bid half a million francs (£20,000), others might have gone even better. Against all such tempting proposals Hugo stood firm: he did not wish to have the bloom taken off his story by the daily instalment system. His attitude on this point is intelligible and commendable, and he consistently adhered to it.[1]

But literature now gives place to public affairs. Following the sensation of the short and decisive "Sadowa" war of 1866, the attention of Europe was turned towards Paris and the great Exhibition to be held there in 1867. Among the various preparations for this event was the idea of a glorified "Paris guide-book," the parts of which were to be contributed by distinguished authors, and the introduction to which was to be written by Victor Hugo. Nothing loth he undertook this work and used the occasion to indulge more markedly than before in that unmeasured laudation of the *ville lumière* which became one of the

[1] He did not object to his novels appearing in papers *after* their appearance in book form—a very different thing. In this way *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* was published in the *Soleil*, and later on *L'Homme qui rit* in the *Rappel*.

chief factors in the popularity of his later years. Dithyrambic would be a mild word to apply to those prefatory pages with all their gush about the "supremacy of Paris," the "functions of Paris," &c. It is Chauvinism grafted on to humanitarianism, for we are still to have the famous "United States of Europe," but France is to be their centre, and France means Paris. And so Hugo begs his country to "resign herself to a greatness she cannot avoid," and to "accept the predestined expansion by which she becomes the World." Nay, she will "no longer be France but Humanity, no longer a Nation but Ubiquity!" With all this amazing stuff are mingled some singularly unfortunate predictions of the future. Frenchmen and Germans will, we are assured, be one nation marching hand in hand in the path of peace and progress. As to war, it is a thing of the past; it is not only dead, but buried. Doubtless among the distinguished visitors from every country of Europe who were present at the Exhibition some must have held these glowing pages in their hands. Did Bismarck, perchance—it is M. Biré who makes the suggestion—cast his eye upon them? If so, how he must have chuckled—the grim Chancellor who had just laid his heavy heel on Austria, and who was soon to lay it more heavily still on France!

In another way the Paris Exhibition brought the exile into touch with his country. In this year his drama was readmitted to the stage, and *Hernani* was revived at the Français, where it had not been seen for eighteen years. According to Hugo and those who accept his words as gospel, this concession was practically extorted from the Government by the demands of the numerous strangers from all parts of France and abroad who were thronging Paris in 1867. The visitors were keen theatre-goers and loud was their disappointment to find they could see no play by the great poet of the century. "What!" they exclaimed in disgust, as they inspected the bills of the different theatres, "no

Victor Hugo!" In reality, it is probable that the permission given to the Théâtre Français was mainly an act of spontaneous good-nature on the part of Louis Napoléon, always tolerant and ready, so far as the other party would allow him, to forget the "personal quarrel." So *Hernani* was performed, seventy-one times in all between June and December, and its author profited to the extent of £2000 or more in fees. Moreover the second State theatre, the Odéon, was about to revive *Ruy Blas*, rehearsals of which were going on when they were stopped by an unexpected incident. Of recent years the "Voice from Guernsey" had not found occasion to deliver itself in direct abuse of French policy: its utterances had been confined to more or less neutral subjects. It had been raised in sympathy with the Cretan revolt against Turkish misrule: it had implored—though ineffectively—the victorious President of the Mexican Republic to spare the luckless Maximilian: it had recommended as a public duty subscription to the memorial of Voltaire, "whom the priests may well call Lucifer, since he was the morning star of the Great Revolution": it had intervened (1867) on behalf of Fenian leaders condemned to death. Concerning which, here is a useful extract from Hugo's Diary: *May* 27. "Received a letter from Dublin; wives and daughters of Fenians beg me to intercede for their lives." *May* 28. "I have written a declaration for Ireland." *June* 3. "My letter has appeared in the English, French, and Belgian newspapers. The pardon of the condemned men is granted." Never surely was the immediate sequence of cause and effect more beautifully illustrated.

But now the voice was destined to clash once more with the conduct of French affairs. Ill satisfied with the turn of events, Garibaldi had broken out from Caprera and, after a slight success, had been badly beaten (November 3) at Mentana by the Papal troops assisted by a French contingent. This was too much

for Hugo. Straightway he took his pen and lashed in scathing verse with all his old vehemence that "sinister old man" the Pope, and his treacherous accomplice Louis Bonaparte. The publication of the poem *Mentana* decided the Imperial Government to cancel its permission for the production of *Ruy Blas*, and a brief note from Chilly, the director of the Odéon, informed the poet that his play had been prohibited. Hugo's reply took this form: "To M. Louis Bonaparte, the Tuileries. Sir,—I have to acknowledge to you the receipt of the letter signed 'Chilly.'—Victor Hugo."

But though *Ruy Blas* was not produced, *Hernani* still went on for a while at the Français, and was also being given in different provincial towns by a touring company, and so provided the occasion of an event unique in the annals of Guernsey. The provincial company, having finished a satisfactory season in France, bethought itself of paying a compliment to the distinguished author by visiting his island and giving a special performance in his honour. The offer was accepted, and on January 31, 1868, *Hernani* was played before a select audience containing several leading people of the place. As the company only numbered seven, and as there are twenty-five parts in *Hernani*, a good deal of duplication and suppression was necessary. Moreover the Guernsey theatre, seldom used, had none of the ordinary scenery and appliances. Goodwill, however, made up for all deficiencies, and the meagre surroundings only served to remind Hugo pleasantly of similar conditions which had once attended the productions of his great predecessors—Shakespeare and bare boards, Thespis and a waggon. At the end of the play, Mlle. Othon—the Doña Sol—came forward with a wreath of laurels which she handed to the poet, who had watched the performance from a box screened by a curtain. Hugo accepted the graceful attention and instinctively—we have heard, though it may be a libel—placed the wreath upon his head. Then rose up a well-

meaning Englishman, who in loud voice called for "Three cheers for Mister Victor Hugo!" So the proceedings ended.

To these last years of exile belongs also a certain amount of domestic history. The annual summer absence from Guernsey of three or four months was good for the poet's health and spirits: his travels in Belgium or Luxemburg or on the Rhine—whether he was visiting new scenes or revisiting familiar ones—were enjoyed with all the keenness of youth. He had no liking for an itinerary mapped out in advance, but went from place to place as the fancy took him, accompanied by Mme. Drouet and generally by one or both of his sons, the party being often joined by Paul Meurice or other Paris friends. It seems that Hugo's fame as the author of *Les Misérables* made him the object of perpetual attention, and that all his efforts to avoid notice by travelling in an assumed name could not save him from the penalty of greatness—a penalty which we feel sure that he paid with equanimity. It was, we are told, the hope of privacy which took him one year to Zeeland, as away from the beaten track of tourists. But in vain. No sooner was he aboard the ship at Amsterdam than the captain with much ceremony insisted on railing off a space for "M. Victor Hugo." And it was the same when he reached his destination. In every town or village, at every hotel there was equal alacrity and deference. Brussels was always the headquarters from which he started on his tours and to which he returned. Here he usually stayed some time, and here were first introduced to him countrymen whose names were afterwards to become well known—François Coppée, Catulle Mendès, M. Henri Rochefort, and others. At Brussels also he used to rejoin Mme. Hugo, who, now an invalid, spent most of her time in that town or in Paris. Other family changes tended to diminish the party at Hauteville House. It was against Hugo's principles to oppose the union of any man and woman

who were attracted to each other. But it was with a heavy heart that he saw the departure to Nova Scotia of his daughter Adèle married to an Englishman; an ill-fated match, for hardly had they reached America when the husband died and the young widow, overwhelmed by the blow, returned to Europe with her reason hopelessly and permanently afflicted. Another sorrow was the death of a Guernsey lady to whom the poet's second son was engaged; after which François-Victor, unable to endure the sad associations of the place, left the island and resided henceforth mostly in Paris. Later in the same year (1865) the elder son Charles was married at Brussels to Mlle. Alice Lehaene, a ward of Jules Simon. Hugo and his wife were both present at the wedding; and when, early in 1867, a little boy—Georges—was born, great was the grandfather's delight—soon, alas! to be replaced by mourning, for within a year the child died. Happily another boy soon came, also named Georges;[1] and he and his sister Jeanne grew up to be that pair of beloved grandchildren on whom the old man in his later years lavished so much affection, whom he petted and spoiled, and about whom he wrote so prettily in *L'Art d'être Grand-père*.

But these various births, marriages, deaths became insignificant in comparison with the great loss which befell the poet in the summer of 1868. Mme. Hugo, we have said, had been for some time ailing. Visitors to Guernsey who saw her in these later years were struck by her quietness, her melancholy, her seeming lack of interest in ordinary topics. They thought her dull, for she spoke but seldom and then only in those commonplaces which make no impression—a woman, one would say, to whom the present mattered little, and whose thoughts or dreams were always in the past. That may well be so. Even under favourable conditions it is

[1] The idea of giving to the new infant the name of the one who had died will be appreciated by those who remember Hugo's charming poem *Le Revenant* (in *Les Contemplations*).

Mme Victor Hugo.

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difficult to imagine that the wife of Hugo would have been given much chance of shining as a conversationalist. So long as her husband was present, her part would be to do the listening. ("Tu dors, Adèle?" said the great man sharply one evening when he had been holding forth to a visitor, and his wife with eyes closed and hands folded was sitting silent in her chair. "No, no," she replied, "how could you think that I should be asleep when you are talking, cher grand ami?" [1]) But, indeed, Mme. Hugo's circumstances were—it is obvious—not calculated to make her talkative or vivacious. Besides her full share of the bereavements incidental to human life, there was always with her the one great sorrow. There is no need to go back on that, or do more than just recall the well-known page in Asseline's book, in which she bids him go on and join the others at Mme. Drouet's, where he will find laughter and amusement, instead of remaining to mope with her. We know from other sources—we might indeed know it from the very nature of woman—that, however much she had in the lapse of time schooled herself to bear the burden of the other's constant presence, she had never ceased to feel its weight. An effaced woman—or rather a woman who, for the sake of the home and of her husband's glory, had effaced herself—she received, as she deserved, the sympathy and respect of all who knew her. Long since, we gather, Mme. Hugo had lost that active desire to live which is one of the chief factors in prolonging life: physically, she was suffering from disease of the heart, to which a sudden end might at any time be expected. It came when she was staying, in August 1868, at Brussels, having lately come there from Paris. Her husband was with her at the time, as well as her son Charles and his wife. They had been for the usual afternoon drive on August 24, and Mme. Hugo appeared

[1] I borrow this anecdote, and one or two others hereabouts, from *Victor Hugo à Guernsey*, by M. Paul Stapfer, who, as a young man, often saw the poet in the last three years of his exile.

to be then in her ordinary state. On the following day she was seized with a sudden faintness. Clinging to her maid, who was present, she begged her not to go. Alarmed, the servant ran out to send some one for the doctor, then at once returned to her mistress, who had already sunk into an unconsciousness from which she never rallied, dying early in the morning of the 27th. It was arranged, in accordance with her often-expressed desire, that she should be buried beside her daughter Léopoldine. And so, on the 28th, the coffin was placed on the night train for Paris. The poet could not enter France, but—attended by M. Rochefort and one or two other friends—he went with the train as far as the Belgian frontier. Auguste Vacquerie and Paul Meurice travelled on to Paris, where they were met by others who joined them in escorting the body to its resting-place in the cemetery of Villequier. Thus was said Hugo's last farewell to her who had shared his fortunes for nigh fifty years. Apart from the rest, alone with memory and grief, he stood that night with bowed head on the platform at Quiévrain ; and the train drew slowly away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII

1868–1871

Return to Guernsey : A memory of the past : Hugo and the English language : *L'Homme qui rit* : At the Lausanne Congress : Foundation of *Le Rappel* : Outbreak of war : Hugo's journey from Brussels to Paris : His manifestoes : Recitations of *Les Châtiments* : Hugo during the siege : *L'Année Terrible* : In the Bordeaux Assembly : The "Garibaldi" incident : Hugo's resignation

WITH his wife's death the chief link between Hugo and his early days disappeared. Among the many condolences he received some came from people who had long since passed out of his ken—people who had no liking for his later opinions and whose existence he, for his part, had wellnigh forgotten. To all such letters the poet replied feelingly and gracefully. But —and it may be said without any disparagement to the sincerity of his grief—he was eminently a man of the present and the future, occupied mainly with those general problems of humanity of which he deemed himself the exponent especially authorised by Providence. After staying for some weeks longer in Brussels he returned to Guernsey. He records an interesting meeting—another old memory—which occurred on the passage from Ostend to Dover. Among the travellers on the boat was an elderly and distinguished-looking man with whom he got into conversation, exchanging the usual remarks about the probability of a good crossing, &c. After a while the stranger said : "You do not recognise me, I see ; but I know who you are—Victor Hugo. My name is Joinville." It was the Prince de Joinville, the third son of Louis-Philippe.

Then the two men, both exiles though for very different reasons, talked politics. "I assure you," said Hugo, "that a Republic is the only solution." "But a Republic," observed the Prince, "requires many virtues." "Yes, that is where it differs from a Monarchy, which requires many vices," was the reply. The Prince assented with a smile, and soon afterwards introduced the poet to the Princess, who reminded him that he had escorted her into the Academy on the day of Sainte-Beuve's admission. At parting they shook hands cordially. "We are poles apart," said Hugo to his fellow-traveller, "but you are a noble and a valiant soul. What a pity it is that you are a Prince!"

So the widower returned to Guernsey, where his wife's sister, Mme. Chenay, who had been living there for some time, remained to keep house for him—a gentle, subdued woman, rather afraid of her brother-in-law. No other members of the family lived there now, and Hauteville House must have been a desolate place with all its younger people gone; just as its master seemed a desolate figure to those who met him on his frequent solitary rambles—a figure made familiar by one of his best-known photographs which represent him with a grim—not to say truculent—expression of face, wearing a soft felt hat, with a small bow tie visible at the top of a rather untidy vest, and with hands thrust deep into the cross-pockets of his trousers. (For in this guise, without overcoat or umbrella, Hugo used to wander about in all weathers.) Yet there was no lack of visitors. Some one was always coming to see the poet—literary men, painters, sculptors, photographers. Newspaper "interviewing" was then in its infancy, but we find in the Diary (1866) a note which tells us that the enterprising Mr. Smalley of the New York *Tribune* called at Hauteville House. "He has come to Europe," says Hugo, "to see me." A very creditable object. But the interview must have been a remarkable one, for the entry proceeds: "He does

not speak a word of French, and I not a word of English." Concerning this last remark it may strike us as curious that a man who had lived all those years on British territory should be so ignorant of our language. Yet this was a profession Hugo always made—with a certain lordliness and probably a good deal of exaggeration.[1] The spirit of it we can detect in a little incident belonging to this period. One day in the train—on one of his journeys to or from Brussels—he happened to find himself in the company of two English ladies who spoke French. In the course of conversation they observed that it must be inconvenient for him not to know English when he was passing through that country. To which the great man's reply was: "When England wants to talk with me, she will learn my language." "From their astonishment at this answer," said Hugo in relating the story, "it was evident that *they did not know who I was.*"

But ignorance of our language, as it is or has been, was no bar to a superior knowledge of what it ought to be or to have been; nor yet to very special and original views about our history. When Hugo was in Brussels in 1868 it was observed that he was making researches concerning the English aristocracy: hence a rumour that the Master was about to write a history of England. Happily—for the Master's sake—this report was much exaggerated. But he was, in fact, engaged upon that curious work of fiction which appeared in 1869 under the title of *L'Homme qui rit,* and which was translated into English as "By order of the King" (from its sub-title in French). When we find Hugo writing to his publisher and objecting to his book being advertised as an "historical romance," we have hopes for a moment that he intends to suggest a "weird fantasy" as its proper designation. But not at all. For the letter goes on: "It is a true picture of England painted

[1] The only English word he owned to knowing was "Christmas," which he always pronounced "Christmus."

by means of invented characters." "Invented"—yes, certainly, there is no lack of invention either in the characters or in their names (Lord Tom Jim-Jack, Goricum, Barkilphedro, &c.); but as to the "true picture of England," in Queen Anne's reign or any other—well, it is plain that Hugo's exile had lasted quite long enough. By dint of self-absorption and the admiring deference of his circle he must have reached a conviction that people would accept whatever he chose to write—a pitch of arrogance which seems to border on imbecility. *L'Homme qui rit,* with its fundamental absurdity and its abnormal digressions, must indeed always be a tough morsel for ardent Hugoists to digest; and they have to fall back on the undeniable truth that it contains several fine passages.

Yes, it was time that Hugo's exile should end; and the end was drawing near, though he knew it not nor how it should come to pass. Domestic changes and losses in no way impaired his interest in public matters. In 1868 he advised the Spanish, after Isabella's flight, to make themselves into a Republic. To the United States—where he had admirers who toasted him as the "predestined regenerator of the old world"—he addressed a rather impracticable appeal for their intervention on behalf of Crete. On September 14 he opened a Peace Congress at Lausanne and said: "Republicanism and Socialism are one. My own Socialism dates from 1828 (?) and embraces the whole social problem—the question of work and wages, the inviolability of human life, the replacement of punishment by education (gratuitous and compulsory), the rights of woman as the equal of man, the rights of the child—in short, the sovereignty of the individual which is identical with liberty."

The words are quoted because they seem to summarise Hugo's Socialist opinions, which are not very alarming, though the meaning of the last line—as a definition of Socialism—is hard to conjecture. More important,

however, was the poet's renewed concern in French politics. There were many signs, especially since the Mexican fiasco, that the Imperial Government was losing ground: in Paris, certainly, the Opposition grew stronger. And in this movement Hugo found means to take a part by the establishment, in 1869, of a journal edited by his two sons, together with Meurice, Vacquerie, and M. Rochefort—the staff, in fact (with the exception of the last named) of the old *Evénement*. Not being on the spot Hugo could have no direct share in the editing of the *Rappel*, as the new paper was called [1]: moreover, he disclaimed—as with the *Evénement*—any influence on its views. Yet there was no doubt that this journal, like its predecessor, might justly be called his organ, and though not avowedly political, it was more than once in trouble for its articles.

For the moment, whatever hopes the Opposition cherished were rudely shattered by the result of the plebiscite of May 8, 1870, in which the nation was asked to signify by a simple "Yes" or "No" its approval or otherwise of the Emperor's policy. Consulted by his friends as to how this appeal should be answered, Hugo had had published his emphatic opinion. "*Non*," he wrote; "in three letters that word says everything." And he ended thus: "If the author of the *coup d'état* wants to put any question to the people, the only one he is entitled to put is this—'Ought I to quit the Tuileries for the Conciergerie and deliver myself up to justice?'"

But in spite of this manifesto, in spite of all the efforts of the Republicans, an overwhelming majority of votes supported the Government. The odds seemed all in favour of Louis Napoléon remaining at the Tuileries

[1] The name was selected out of many suggestions because it seemed to imply several good meanings—*e.g.* a *reminder* of the past, a *rally* round the Republican flag, a *recall* of M. Bonaparte to his duty, &c. &c.

and Victor Hugo in Guernsey. Then came the unexpected—unexpected, that is, by the poet who, not being behind the political scenes, was chiefly absorbed during the early summer of 1870 in the first visit to Hauteville House of his two little grandchildren, Georges and Jeanne—the former of whom (so the Diary tells us) had with a nice sense of relationship invented for his grandfather the name of "Pa-papa." The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War (July 15), soon followed by news of the first French reverses, made the downfall of Napoleon a possibility. On August 17 Hugo left Guernsey for Brussels to await events, being in constant communication with his Paris friends, who, on September 4—after the disaster of Sedan and the abolition of the Empire—telegraphed to him, "Bring children at once," which, as prearranged, meant to say "Come."

It was a melancholy home-coming. "When Liberty returns to France, I shall return," Hugo had said, little thinking that—now as in 1814—"Liberty" would be brought by the foreign invader. And though it was with mixed feelings that he left Brussels on September 5, we cannot doubt that sorrow for the calamities of his country outweighed exultation at the ruin of his personal enemy. That journey has been graphically sketched by M. Jules Claretie, who (together with Charles Hugo) accompanied the poet. He has shown us the exile standing at the Brussels booking-office and, in a tone of emotion we can easily understand, asking for a "ticket to Paris"; then the passing of the frontier; then the hurried meal in the refreshment-room at Tergnier, and the unfinished crust which Hugo put in his pocket to commemorate this first breaking of bread in his native land. Soon it was a more pathetic scene. As the train moved slowly through Landrecies, they passed close to a number of French troops belonging to Vinoy's beaten army. The sight of these poor fellows, in the familiar uniform,

as they lay, tired out and dejected, by the roadside, went straight to the heart of one who was himself a soldier's son. Putting his head out of the window, he strove to encourage and console them. "Vive la France!" he cried. "Vive la patrie! You have done your best, my brave fellows, it is not your fault: cheer up!" But they, sullen with the sense of defeat, had no heart to respond; and this excited old man gesticulating out of the carriage must have seemed to them as one who mocked. It was nearly 10 P.M. when the Gare du Nord was reached. Not only were Hugo's private friends gathered in force to meet him, but the news of his coming had attracted a considerable crowd eager to express anti-Imperial feeling by a noisy welcome to the Republican champion. As he stepped on to the platform loud cheers were raised; but it happened that some coaches containing wounded men had been attached to the train, and, one of the doctors appealing on their behalf, the cheering was at once hushed. Outside the station, however, there was no restraining the enthusiasm of the populace, who thronged round the poet's carriage, applauded the spirited words in which he appealed to them for unity, and escorted him to Paul Meurice's house in the Avenue Frochot, which was to be his home during the siege.

In such wise did Victor Hugo "enter" (as the old chronicles used to put it) "his good town of Paris" —the *ville lumière* over which so dark a cloud had now settled. His part during the evil days that followed has been recorded by himself and commented on less partially by others. A week or so after his arrival the investment was complete and the siege began. In vain the poet hurled defiance at the enemy in a manifesto extolling the glory of Paris and warning invaders against laying sacrilegious hands on a city compared to which the other capitals of Europe were merely provincial towns. Considered as an appeal to the Parisian gallery this address *Aux Allemands* may have

done well enough: on the Germans its only effect seems to have been to irritate some of the newspapers into suggesting that the author ought to be hanged. More sensible were Hugo's exhortations to his countrymen to lay aside internal dissensions and unite against the common danger. Yet documents of this sort—appeals to patriotism or abuse of the enemy—do not demand too close a scrutiny: otherwise, one might detect a certain sameness in the poet's language about the Prussians now and that which he had used twenty years ago about the makers of the *coup d'état*. Once more there is talk of "bandits and mercenaries," of "stones and pitch-forks": again our friend "Schinderhannes" is to the fore, though instead of Louis Napoléon it is King William who is now Schinderhannes. And somehow these later invectives seem not so effective as the earlier ones—perhaps because not quite so heartfelt. The defiant ending of the address "To the Germans"—"As for me, old man that I am, I shall meet you unarmed"—suggests the impassive heroism of those ancient Romans who are said to have awaited the onset of the Gauls, sitting motionless in their curule chairs. But that was by no means Hugo's attitude. Now, as during the fighting of the *coup d'état*, he resisted all temptation to expose himself recklessly to shot and shell. And who should blame his prudence? As an "old man, unarmed," he could do better service with words than with deeds. Now and then, in an access of martial spirit and as an example to others, he donned the uniform of the National Guard Artillery, in which his two sons were serving; and it was doubtless the memory of such moments, worked upon by imagination, which made him—long after the war was over—so fond of referring in conversation to his eagerness for the fray and the difficulty with which he had been held back from rushing into it. On these occasions his hearers—whatever they may have thought—were generally polite enough to feign

assent ; after all, if it pleased the old man, what did it matter ? [1]

But there were other more appropriate ways in which Hugo could contribute conspicuously to the work of defence. His manifestoes have been mentioned ; still more he was brought in touch with the multitude by the wide circulation of *Les Châtiments,* the first Paris edition of which—with five additional pieces—was now published (October 20). At a time when the book-trade in general was at a standstill this work was sold everywhere, even by the hawkers of the streets, and was eagerly bought. In the light of recent events those pages of fierce denunciation seemed as the warning vision of a patriotic seer. The "man of December 2" had become "the man of Sedan"—crime and retribution, prophecy and fulfilment. So people felt, in the vulgar and violent reaction of the moment ; and so feeling, they gloated over *Les Châtiments.* But Hugo, as patriotism demanded, at once made over the first receipts from the sale of his book as a subscription towards the making of guns. He fell in also readily with the proposal of the Société des Gens de Lettres, which had made him its President, that recitations should be given from *Les Châtiments* for the same purpose. The Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre was put at their disposal, and the leading actors and actresses gave their services. There were two performances, each well attended ; and at each the hat was sent round—or rather, helmets captured from the enemy in which Mme. Bernhardt and others made a collection from the audience. The result was to

[1] M. Biré, however, on the authority of some unpublished memoirs, states a story to the effect that one day after the siege, at a meeting of one of the various Relief Committees, when Hugo had been expatiating on his prowess, the Admiral who presided over the Committee, and who during the siege had commanded the naval division serving in the Paris forts, turned impatiently to his neighbour and said : "That is all untrue—absolutely untrue ! I invited him one day to lunch with me in my fort, and he never dared to come ! "

realise something like £600, the greater part of which was devoted to the casting and mounting of two guns, named, in honour of their origin, "Le Châtiment" and "Le Victor Hugo." And besides these obvious manifestations of public spirit, the poet doubtless also took his fair share in the work of charitable relief rendered necessary by the distress which the war occasioned. Here, as everywhere else, he has found detractors charging him in some cases with stinginess, in others with egoism and caprice. Such accusations, originating often in misunderstanding or malevolence, and always apt to be exaggerated, must not be taken too seriously. We find it easier, for example, to be amused than to be indignant in hearing—it is a good story—how, when the "Franc-Comtois" Committee (formed to raise a fund for helping the destitute people of what in old times was called the "Franche-Comté") called upon Hugo for a subscription, he demurred on the ground that he was not connected with that district. "Why," he exclaimed, "every town in France claims me! I am not a Franc-Comtois, I belong to Lorraine!" And when it was respectfully pointed out to him that one of his best-known poems began "*Un jour dans Besançon,*" he interrupted with, "Oh! certainly, yes I was born at Besançon, but that was simply by chance . . . a mere accident, I assure you."

But whatever the rights or wrongs of any particular case may be, we cannot ignore Hugo's own explicit statement [1] that between 1870 and 1872 he gave away

[1] In a letter of November 1872 to his old friend, the architect Robelin. To whom also he apologises for not being able to give him as much pecuniary help as he would like on the ground that he himself is suffering from a shortness of money. His income, it seems, is already appropriated, partly by allowances to his children, chiefly by an undertaking he has made to pay every year for the next three years a sum of 67,000 francs into the National Bank of Belgium. It is true that this is not the repayment of a debt but an investment—and a good investment, too; but still, as Hugo (pity the poor man!) blandly explains, it has to come out of his income.

in charitable and patriotic objects no less than £1400; for though the figure is not likely to be understated, it probably bears some relation to the facts. Nor, again, does it seem quite reasonable to cavil at the poet if, amid the privations and sufferings of the siege, he managed to make himself fairly comfortable: his age was surely entitled to that indulgence. Although he was staying at Paul Meurice's he took his meals usually at the Pavillon de Rohan in the Rue de Rivoli, where his sons and grandchildren were living; and here he had many visitors, including "whole sofas full of admiring women (as the Journal of the De Goncourts notes), who surrounded the god and waited for the words from his lips." It was the beginning of an apotheosis for which, however, the time was hardly yet ripe, while the thoughts of all tended to turn solely on the lamentable condition of the moment. Still, there was a fair amount of general conversation in which Hugo discoursed on poetry, architecture, the mountains of the moon—anything, as a diversion from such eternal topics as the effect of the last bombardment or the chances of the next *sortie*. At meal-times—most critical of all times for a famine-stricken city—he seems to have been generally cheerful, even jocose, over the doubtful or indigestible fare which was often their portion. Sometimes he would drop into poetic speculation on the substance—as distinct from the flavouring—of a handsome pie which had been sent him; or he would entertain the company with a couplet in which there was a play on *sourires* and *souris;* or he would improvise a quatrain with a sportive reference to "the wing of Pegasus," suggested by some especially tough joints of unmistakable horse. By many such harmless little quips and cranks did the poet in Mark Tapley mood try to make the best of things. "Our stomach," he writes, "is a Noah's Ark, into which every beast enters—dog and cat, horse and rat, mouse and elephant—they all meet there. . . . But never mind, we shall

drive off the Prussians, and we shall come and see you, Madame, in March—if we are not killed in February."

The quotation comes from a piece in *L'Année Terrible* addressed "To a Lady," and despatched by balloon post on January 10, 1871—only a week, that is, before the capitulation of Paris. And it is in *L'Année Terrible* that we find the most authentic expression of Hugo's thoughts and emotions during the siege and the troubles which followed it. This journal in verse (written at the time of the events, though not published until 1872) refutes by its many pathetic passages those who censure the poet's lightheartedness as showing him unconscious of, or indifferent to, the misery of his humbler fellow-citizens. (How, indeed, could he have alleviated this by perpetual melancholy? Far better to keep up the fiction of not being downhearted.) But *L'Année Terrible* indicates also—what the future was to prove most plainly—that Hugo never grasped the practical necessities of the situation. It is true that he probably had no belief in General Trochu and his celebrated "plan"[1]; but he was evidently in constant expectation that something or somebody would turn up to save Paris. To the end he could never quite realise the amazing audacity of these barbarous Teutons in camping round the "capital of the world" and throwing shells into it: some fine morning surely the miscreants would become aware of their iniquity and would slink away, contrite and ashamed. Vague optimism, alternating with hysterical abuse of the enemy and bitter reproaches against the Powers of Europe for their non-intervention, and producing an effect of feebleness and artificiality! Words! words! words!

[1] It was some months later that Trochu, in defending himself, spoke slightingly of the fighting value of the National Guard, "which," said he, "was pretty well represented by M. Victor Hugo in his *képi*." This indiscretion procured for the General the piece in *L'Année Terrible* beginning "Participe passé du verbe Tropchoir."

The same remoteness from reality strikes us even more when we come to the next scene. It is at Bordeaux, where the representatives of France are assembled, in February 1871, to decide whether they shall make peace on the basis of the preliminaries signed at Versailles, or shall continue the struggle. Among the seven hundred or so Deputies who met in the historic southern town, no figure was more interesting than that of the long-exiled poet, who was now, after twenty years, resuming a part in practical politics. His popularity in Paris had been shown by his election second among the forty-three representatives of the Department of the Seine: at Bordeaux the crowd thronged in front of his hotel, cheered him when he showed himself on the balcony and clamoured for a speech which—except for a few words of thanks—he had the discretion to decline. There was no doubt that he was the people's man; but how, an impartial observer might wonder, would he shape in this crisis of his country—an occasion, if ever, when rhetorical patriotism would need to be tempered by sober common sense? The result, alas! was to show that for approaching his task in this spirit the poet could have had no worse training than the long seclusion of his Guernsey life, during which he had been in touch only with those to whom his word was the final settlement of all questions. From this atmosphere of absolutism, intensified by the popularity he had enjoyed since his return, came an alarming increase in the Hugoism of Hugo: hence the fatal and undisguised consciousness of superiority which he brought with him to the Assembly at Bordeaux, where he had to meet and deal with practical men engaged in an urgent and painful duty.

From the first, Hugo, as we gather from his letters, felt out of sympathy with the majority of his colleagues. To most of them, grievous as the humiliation was, it had long been apparent that the truest patriotism lay in accepting the best terms they could get, that

sporadic resistance by hastily levied troops, after the defeat of regular armies, could only be disastrous, and that every week of the continuance of war meant an addition to the sum of ultimate loss. The vote of the majority was, therefore, a foregone conclusion, made evident by the discussions of the various sectional committees before the question came to the Assembly as a whole. At that meeting, on March 1, Hugo protested vehemently against the dismemberment of France: he advocated "war for the present and peace for the future: let France overthrow Germany and then join hands with her, saying, 'I am not your enemy but your sister; we will have no frontiers henceforth, the Rhine shall be open to all; let us form together one Republic—the United States of Europe; let us shake hands as having rendered each other a mutual service—you by delivering me from my Emperor, I by delivering you from yours!'"

Apart from the childish idea that the war might be continued with any prospect of turning the tables, there was something especially irrelevant and tactless in choosing this moment for airing Utopian sentiments and urging poor France to embrace as a sister the enemy who was strangling her; and this conclusion of Hugo's speech disgusted even those who were, like him, opposed to peace. His warmest admirers could only shake their heads and regret that he had "treated the subject from a poetic point of view," which was, no doubt, the politest way of saying that he had made a fool of himself. It might be added that in this theatrical oratory there was one note of possible, though of course unintentional, mischief. The evil that Hugo had most deprecated was disunion; and yet constant emphasis was laid on the sufferings and the glory of Paris, his declaration that as a representative of Paris he felt bound to oppose peace, his demand that the Assembly, having accepted the terms, should return at once to Paris—all such implication of a

contrast between Paris and the rest of France, if it had any effect, must have tended to encourage the separatist principles which, adopted by unscrupulous men, were soon to kindle civil war between the capital and the country.

Nor can the poet's conduct, in the incident which abruptly ended his connection with the Bordeaux Assembly, be commended as very judicious or dignified. It was on March 8 that the Garibaldi question came up. That veteran of freedom who had been fighting without success for France was perhaps entitled to the popular gratitude displayed by his election in three different departments as a member of the Assembly. Each of these seats, however, Garibaldi had declined; and therefore, though he desired to address the Assembly, he had been disqualified from doing so. It was now (March 8) announced that he had been returned for yet another constituency, Algiers; but, as his previous refusals—together with his resignation of the command of the Army of the Vosges—seemed to indicate his intention of declining French citizenship and taking no further part in French affairs, the Assembly at once adopted a proposal annulling the Algiers election. Thereupon up sprang Hugo, indignant at this slight on his friend and admirer; and after extolling Garibaldi's services, he proceeded thus: "And I will say this, gentlemen: I do not wish to hurt any one's feelings, but, of all the generals who have fought for France, Garibaldi is the only one who has not been defeated." The uproar with which these words—untrue as well as indiscreet—were received, can be well imagined. The speaker's voice was drowned in cries of angry protestation, one member proposing "that M. Victor Hugo be not heard, as he does not speak French!" At length President Grévy managed to invite Hugo to offer an explanation. On which the poet said: "I will satisfy you, gentlemen, I will do more than satisfy you. Three weeks ago you refused to listen to Garibaldi, to-day you

refuse to listen to me. That is enough: I tender my resignation." And stepping down from the tribune, he took pen and paper from one of the reporters and wrote down the words he had just spoken, handing them—with his signature—to the President. He then left the Assembly, no longer a member of it. During the next few days several attempts were made by influential members to make him reconsider his resignation: even among those who regarded him as politically impossible, there were many who felt that the great poet of France was a sort of moral asset to the Assembly. But these efforts were in vain. Hugo had more reasons than one for being dissatisfied with the proceedings of his colleagues, and this Garibaldi incident was only the occasion rather than the cause of his withdrawal, which coincided with that of Gambetta, Floquet, Clemenceau, and others.

CHAPTER XVIII

1871–1873

Death of Charles Hugo : The Commune and Hugo's attitude towards it : The "Belgian incident" : Hugo expelled from Brussels : Graphic details of the affair : Stay at Vianden : Clerical hostility : Hugo as a fireman : Intervention on behalf of Rochefort : Political worries and reverses : *Ruy Blas* successfully revived : *L'Année Terrible* : *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* and its purpose : More revivals : Death and funeral of François-Victor Hugo

After severing his connection with the Bordeaux Assembly Hugo intended returning to Paris on March 14, and on the evening before his departure he was entertaining some friends to dinner. Among these he expected his son Charles, who was staying in Bordeaux and was about to go with his wife and the two children for a few weeks to Arcachon. The dinner-hour came, but Charles Hugo did not appear. He had spoken of business that afternoon, and so after waiting for half an hour the rest—supposing him to be detained—sat down to table. A few minutes afterwards the proprietor of the restaurant came upstairs and asked to speak privately with M. Victor Hugo. The news he had to tell was the sudden death of the poet's son, who had expired as he was driving home in a cab, from the rupture of an aneurism. Thus one more was added to the domestic tragedies of the Hugo family. The father, after consoling as best he could his bereaved daughter-in-law, accompanied his son's remains to Paris, where the burial took place in Père-Lachaise on March 18. On that day, which was to be marked by the dastardly murder at Montmartre of Generals Thomas and Lecomte, the

streets showed clear signs of the coming struggle between the Government and the Communists. National Guards, in sympathy with the rebels, were posted at frequent intervals; and as the funeral procession passed from the Gare d'Orléans to the cemetery, with the poet bare-headed walking behind the coffin, several of the troops presented arms as a mark of respect : others fell in and marched alongside the procession, which was also increased by a miscellaneous mob of street loiterers. Sympathy with Hugo—whose paper, *Le Rappel,* had always taken a Communist line—was made the occasion of a political demonstration, and as he left Père-Lachaise, cries of "Vive la République!" were freely mingled with cries of "Vive Victor Hugo!"

Three days later Hugo left for Brussels. It was there that his son had been married and had until recently resided, there that the two children had been born ; and Belgian law required his presence now for the settlement of their affairs. As soon as these formalities were accomplished, he would—so the *Rappel* announced—return at once to Paris. He did not, however, return ; and so he was absent during the murderous strife between the Versailles troops and the Paris populace. A convenient absence certainly, since it relieved him from the necessity of adopting definitely one course or the other, and enabled him—sitting on the fence—to address reproaches and appeals to each side in turn. He was dismayed by the violent turn of events and could only expend himself in unheeded appeals for mercy and moderation.[1] To him the "Commune was as senseless as the Assembly was brutal." Yet, so far as there was a principle at stake, he avowed himself in favour of the former. "The Commune," he said, "is a good thing badly done." Explicitly and in many words he advocated the right of Paris to a self-government so complete and absolute that it would have meant the establish-

[1] See *Un Cri, Pas de représailles, Les deux trophées,* in *L'Année Terrible* (April and May 1871). They appeared originally in *Le Rappel.*

ment of a rival power within the State. For months before the Civil War broke out the *Rappel* had been regarded as an organ of these views, and the name of Victor Hugo figured conspicuously in suggested Communist Ministries. But, in the actual horrors of the insurrection, the municipal question lapsed into a very secondary place. Concurrently with it, there had been, since October 1870, a growing discontent with the administration both political and military, and an ever more threatening demand for a return to the drastic methods of 1793. "In those days," it was argued, "France, a genuine Republic, with the Commune and the Committee of Public Safety—to say nothing of the guillotine; France, with her citizen-generals and her untrained troops, carried all before her. And why was she now so helpless? Because, forsooth, her government was in the hands of lukewarm Republicans—'ruminants of Monarchy' (as the *Rappel* called them)—who were going to manage Paris from Versailles as they had already done from Bordeaux." Such, magnified and inflamed, were the sentiments animating the extreme leaders of the insurrection, and though Hugo might have accepted them as theory, he was of course not prepared to see them translated into action by men whose ambition was to be the apes of Danton, Marat, and Robespierre. Yet, maintaining that the Assembly was primarily responsible for all the trouble, he persisted in regarding the beaten Communists—even after their final outrages—as a political party entitled to the asylum of neutral countries.

This, however, was not the view of the Belgian Government, or indeed of any Government. And the Belgian Foreign Minister lost no time in declaring that he and his colleagues would refuse shelter on Belgian soil to "men who were not political refugees, but criminals deserving punishment." Two days later (May 27) appeared in the *Indépendance Belge* Hugo's letter of protest, which may be condensed thus: "These

men, the worsted Parisian party, are—whatever you say—political persons. I was not with them and I do not approve of their savage violence. But barbarous acts (such as the destruction of the Column) being unconscious, are not criminal acts: madness is a disease, not a punishable offence. . . . For myself, I declare that at my house here in Brussels, 4 Place des Barricades, I offer a place of refuge to any member of the party called the Commune; and that if any of these men, though he should be my personal enemy—nay, especially should he be my present enemy—knocks at my door, I will open it to him, and in my house he shall be inviolable."

The immediate result of this letter was what is known as "the Belgian incident." That same night a dozen or so of young "bloods"—one of whom was a Frenchman—having spent a merry evening, resolved to wind it up by "ragging" Victor Hugo. They proceeded to his house, and, while the rest remained in hiding behind the railing of the square, one of them, playing the part of the refugee from Paris, rang twice at the door. It was past midnight and the poet was already in bed. Besides himself the only occupants of the house were his daughter-in-law and her two infants, together with three female servants. Mme. Charles Hugo, still suffering from the shock of her husband's death, was in a very weak state, and Jeanne, the younger of the children, was also ailing. On hearing the double ring Hugo put on his dressing-gown, opened his window looking on the front, and leaning out asked who was there. "Dombrowski," was the reply. Puzzled at hearing the name of a man who was reported to have been killed, Hugo the next moment discerned the group of figures by the railings. At once he realised that the whole thing was a plant, and crying out, "You rascals!" he quickly closed the window. Hardly had he done so when a stone came crashing into the glass, then a second and a third. There were shouts of "Down with Victor

Hugo! Down with the Communist!" &c., not without more threatening cries of "*A la potence! A la lanterne!*" At the same time an assault was delivered on the front door, and an attempt made to wrench off the shutters from the ground-floor windows. After fifteen minutes or so the rioters went away; and, though a few of them passed by the house again an hour later, they contented themselves on this occasion with some opprobrious epithets. About 3 A.M. an officer of police called to make inquiries, but was requested to come again at a more seasonable hour. He returned in the course of the morning, and the details just recorded represent in substance the account given to him of the affair.

After dinner that evening, Hugo, by special invitation, called on the Prefect of Police, who was polite and sympathetic. "The Belgian Government, I assure you, sir, will have every consideration for you." To which Hugo sternly replied: "It is I who have consideration for the Belgian Government. I do not want it from them; what I demand from them is justice." And he was insistent that the offenders should be discovered and punished, protesting—a protest in which every one will agree with him—that it was a monstrous thing for an old man and a few defenceless women to have been subjected to such an outrage. Where, he asked, had the police been? Surely a futile question, since every one knows that it is the prerogative of the police in all countries to be everywhere except where they are most wanted. But if M. Hugo had very good cause for complaint against the Brussels Government, they—unfortunately for him—had their own grievance against M. Hugo. And their grievance, prior to and more important than his, was the letter in which, abusing the hospitality of the country where he was staying, and defying its laws, he had offered shelter to Communist refugees. This was the first question to be settled, and as Hugo declined to settle it by voluntary retirement, a decree of expulsion was issued on May 30,

in accordance with which he left Brussels on June 1. As to the perpetrators of the disturbance, it is not clear whether the authorities made any special effort to discover them, but two of them were afterwards identified —one being the son of a Minister of State—and proceedings were instituted, though they were eventually abandoned.

There was naturally much comment on these matters in Paris, where sympathy for the assaulted poet was as a rule quite subordinate to indignation at his pro-Communist manifesto ; indeed, many even of his usual Radical associates—Louis Blanc, for instance, and Schoelcher—expressed their disapproval of his letter to the *Indépendance Belge*. And Parisian critics were not slow to exercise their wits over a picturesque and sensational account of the nocturnal attack which was given on May 30, in a letter to the same paper, signed "François-Victor Hugo." According to this narrative —dictated of course by Hugo, since his son had not been present on the occasion—the affair was not a mere ebullition of youthful spirits but a diabolical scheme to take his life: "*Tuons Victor Hugo!*" had been the battle-cry. It was not a case of two or three stones but of a "hail of projectiles," which fell upon the house not for a few minutes but for two hours ; it was no mere casual outburst of rowdyism but "a regular siege" undertaken by a "crowd of men," in the course of which not only were the front and door of the house continuously battered, but three separate attempts were made to scale the walls—attempts only frustrated by the absence of ladders. And then—as a final touch—the cries of "*A bas le Communard! A mort le brigand!*" were varied with jeering references to "Jean Valjean" and even to "Lord Clancharlie"—by which latter name the miscreants showed at any rate a laudable familiarity with Hugo's latest novel, *L'Homme qui rit!*

All this graphic story was discussed on May 31 in the Belgian Chamber, where the letter of "François-

Victor Hugo" was characterised as "a romance" when compared with the facts ascertained by police investigation. It was obvious that the affair could not have lasted two hours without arousing the whole neighbourhood; it was still more certain that the door and walls would have borne palpable marks of such terrible assault and battery, whereas in fact they exhibited hardly a scratch. Hence the conclusion that these matters had been "considerably amplified and dramatised" by a master hand. So also thought a good many of the poet's own countrymen, whose opinions were reflected in this remark of Francisque Sarcey (in the *Gaulois*): "We may be sure that the great man will pick up all those stones which were flung at his windows and will use them to make a pedestal for his vanity." And that was a true prediction, for Hugo never wearied of returning to the subject, and at each return he embellished it—artist as he was—with new and picturesque details. Thus in *Paris et Rome* (1876) we read: "*More than five hundred stones* were hurled into my room . . . walls, ceiling, floor, furniture, glass and china—it was all like a place that had been riddled by grape-shot." And he proceeds to describe the outrage as instigated by his clerical enemies, "the disciples of the Vatican"—a theory which enabled him to point the moral he wanted to point about the evils of priest-craft, &c. This was, indeed, a belief he cherished from the very first, as may be seen from the entry dated May 27 in his recently published notebook. There he writes—presumably just after the incident—"It was a reactionary and Bonapartist plot, winked at by the clerically disposed Government." The same passage gives an admirable picture of the midnight scene—the two scared children, "little Jeanne (who had come into my room and had been almost grazed by a stone) staring with horror-stricken eyes and Georges exclaiming, 'It's the Prussians!'" the frightened women screaming wildly for help, the master himself calm and collected.

"I kept silence," he says, "and I waited. . . . I was being besieged by *fifty or sixty* men armed with stones and cudgels . . . I was without weapons and had not even a walking-stick. I was face to face with a cruel death at the hand of assassins. Three times the furious attack was renewed; there were intervals of silence, and in those intervals I heard in the distance the song of the nightingale." Quite the right attitude, it will be seen, for the great man with an eye to that pedestal already referred to.

Having perforce shaken off the dust of Brussels from his feet, Hugo turned his steps to Vianden in Luxemburg. It was not his first visit to that picturesque mediæval township, in those days unknown to tourists. Twice at least during his residence in Guernsey he had been to Vianden for a portion of his annual holiday, and he had interested himself keenly and successfully in preventing some barbarous restorations of the ancient *château*. He was coming, therefore, as a friend to friends. Perhaps rather an embarrassing visitor in his present mood, but the Government of the Grand Duchy was content with cautioning him not to involve it in difficulties with its neighbours. As to the people of Vianden, they received him with musical honours, the Philharmonic Society of the place turning out to serenade him and he acknowledging the attention in an appropriate speech. Here Hugo, with his family and M. and Mme. Paul Meurice, passed some peaceful months in surroundings which appealed strongly to his poetic and artistic fancy. From his window he looked to the left over the river Ourthe, with meadows and gardens stretching on one bank and on the other a green grassy hill; in front of him were the disused tanneries, the remains of the old town wall, and the bridge with its statue of Saint-Jean Népomucène; on the right, low red-roofed houses with cracked and bulging walls, the church and the belfry tower; and—overshadowing all—the dark outline of the grim castle and its ruined keep. He was

charmed with these remnants of feudal days, contrasted as they were with the busy life of a smiling people sufficiently modern to appreciate the distinguished person in their midst. He soon found his favourite points of view, and many a striking impressionist sketch he made—as visitors to the Hugo Museum will remember—of buildings or of landscape. Many a delightful excursion, too, was undertaken either into the Ardennes or to places of special antiquarian interest—Roth, Stolzembourg, Falkenstein.

But amid the general pleasantness of place and people there was one inevitable note of hostility—one to which Hugo was pretty well accustomed by this time. His anti-clerical opinions—to put it very mildly—had long since made him a grievous rock of offence to the authorities of the Church. It was natural, therefore, that the Bishop of Luxemburg, coming to Vianden to hold a Confirmation, should signify his disapproval by announcing beforehand that he would prefer to be excused from receiving those musical attentions which had recently been accorded to the enemy of the Church. Nevertheless the irrepressible Philharmonic Society insisted on celebrating his Lordship's presence, though it is rumoured that their serenade took a form not quite so complimentary as was proper. Hence an unseemly divergence between the shepherd and some of his flock. But Hugo cared for none of these things. Nor was he moved, except to amusement, by the frank opinions of the *curé* of Vianden, who, in the course of his sermon one Sunday, said: "The devil used to have three religions on the earth—the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Jansenists: now he has a fourth—the Hugoists." He records this outburst in his Diary and adds: "The *curé* is a worthy old man who possesses the only goose to be found in Vianden. The animal accompanies him as he walks through the streets; sometimes the goose follows the *curé*, sometimes the *curé* follows the goose, but they always go together."

One novel and exciting experience befell Hugo at Vianden. It was on a night in the middle of July that he was roused from sleep by loud knocking at his door. From the red glare which came in through his window, and from the cries of "Fire! Fire!" he knew at once what had happened. Looking out he perceived that several thatch-roofed houses, a hundred yards or so from his lodgings, were ablaze. He flung on his clothes and hastened down. The tocsin was ringing, and the streets were full of panic-stricken people. There was no fire brigade or appliances of any sort; moreover, the mayor—or burgomaster—of the place happened to be away. In his absence Hugo took upon himself to direct operations. All available buckets were got together, and two lines were formed stretching from the scene of the fire down to the river. One of these lines, consisting of women and children, had to pass down the empty buckets; the other, consisting of men, passed up the full ones. Hugo himself took a hand among the men, and calculates—he is fond of these little calculations—that, at the rate of one bucket per second, more than 5000 buckets passed through his hands. By means of this double chain a continuous service of water was secured, and in an hour and a half the fire was got under. Next day it was found that six families were homeless, and a subscription was organised on their behalf, to which the poet contributed 300 francs. His action in all this affair considerably enhanced his popularity; it was felt that for a man in his seventieth year he had done well.

Staying at Vianden until nearly the end of August, Hugo then visited some of the scenes of the late war; in particular, he was attracted to Thionville, which was now of course in Prussian occupation. But that was the fortress which in 1814 and 1815 General Hugo had so valiantly defended, and which had then remained untaken. There were still some old people in the place who could remember the General, and who were pleased to see his son and grandson and great-grandson. From

Altwies, where he was staying at the time of this visit, Hugo was recalled to Paris by the news that Rochefort had been sentenced to transportation. On October 1 he interceded with Thiers at Versailles on behalf of his friend—the occasion on which the statesman exclaimed: "My dear poet, you are asking impossibilities: you must remember that I am only a poor beggar of a dictator in a black coat." Nevertheless, Thiers promised that Rochefort should not be sent out of France, and the promise held good as long as he remained in power.[1] He also gave Hugo permission to visit the prisoner, whereby Rochefort was much comforted; he signalised the occasion by writing on the wall of his cell some lines from *L'Année Terrible* which the poet showed to him.

That work had been completed at Vianden and was only awaiting a convenient moment for publication. Meanwhile Hugo, after a short visit to London, took up his quarters at 66 Rue de la Rochefoucauld, where he soon found himself the central attraction of discontented Radicals and Socialists, sympathisers for the most part with the defunct Commune, wearers of the "soft felt hat," which in those days was the symbol of contempt for things in general. Pleasant as it was to receive the deference of these worthies, there is evidence that the poet was rather overwhelmed by his miscellaneous callers. They did not come, we may be sure, simply to gather from his lips eloquent generalities on Republicanism and Liberty; they were not content with his assurance that they were great men and that he loved them like brothers, they were not even ready to go away when the Master had recited to them one of his poems. No, all these people had their axes to grind; and the grinding was a long process involving a mass of details infinitely tedious to listen to, and a variety of conflicting objects the prosecution of which could only thwart or

[1] It was a different thing, of course, when Thiers was replaced as President by Marshal MacMahon, whose Government was much less conciliatory.

delay the one great remedy Hugo desired for the discord of the State—a complete and general amnesty. Worried by so much fussiness and importunity, the great man—we can well believe it—was heard to exclaim wearily, as he sank back on the sofa, "Oh, these politicians!"

In truth, he had good reason just now to be disgusted with politics. His benevolent attitude towards the Communists was capable of being misunderstood; at any rate, it lost him votes, as was shown by an election which took place on July 1871, while he was still at Vianden. On that occasion Paris had to elect twenty-one representatives, and Hugo, put forward by the Radical Committee, was not among the five successful nominees of that party—one of whom was Gambetta. Again, at the beginning of 1872, he was defeated for the National Assembly by Vautrain, a Moderate. These reverses, which he attributed to having "done his duty," contributed to his resolution to retire for a while from active politics. He explained his position when he declined a year later the offer of a safe seat from Lyons. "If I re-entered the Assembly," he wrote, "it would be solely in order to advocate an amnesty; but no such proposal would—in the present temper of the majority—have a chance of being accepted, and its rejection now might damage its prospects in the future."

Distressed at the vindictiveness, as he deemed it, of the victorious party, Hugo turned with relief to the drama and literature. On February 19 *Ruy Blas*—prohibited in 1868—was successfully revived at the Odéon; on June 11 its hundredth performance was celebrated by a banquet given by the author to the company. On this occasion Mme. Bernhardt, who played the Queen, sat on Hugo's right, and he, according to the amiable custom of the profession, embraced each of the ladies in turn, beginning with Sarah and ending with her. Meanwhile *L'Année Terrible*, published in April, was having a demand almost equal to that of *Les Châtiments*. The earlier part of the book, dealing

with the war, has been already characterised ; the later pieces, concerned with the Communist insurrection, are in general marked by that same tone of leniency to the rebels which Hugo had adopted from the first—a tone which often and easily glides into an apparent palliation of the vilest crimes. When one reads about the "great people of Paris, misunderstood and traduced, but sure at length to prevail," about "the ray of dawn, the bright and terrible light" which shone forth above all this bloodshed, and much more to the same effect, one might really suppose that the Commune had been a glorious revolution instead of an outrage on humanity and patriotism. No one supposes that Hugo meant this : he was no ferocious fire-eater, nor yet was he—as his enemies assert—deliberately playing up for popularity with the mob ; he was simply a sentimentalist, exalted by an ill-balanced sense of pity and carried away by a fatal fluency of diction. Be that as it may, his treatment of the later events in the "terrible year" was a cause of grave regret to many of his usual thick and thin admirers—to Paul de Saint-Victor, for instance, who in his study of Hugo laments it unequivocally.

But the poet—or shall we call him philosopher ?—had now reached that ecstatic phase of Radicalism in which the love of Progress and the fear of Reaction are passions unregulated by any discrimination in the meaning of those terms. Such a spirit would naturally seek expression in a theme more ample than was supplied by the recent and vulgar horrors of the Commune. Three years previously Hugo had resolved to write a book on the Great Revolution and to call it *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* —"the '93." That intention he now proceeded to carry out ; and as he had always found the Guernsey air most favourable to literary work, he returned to Hauteville House towards the end of 1872, and there, on December 16, began what was to be his last romance. Taking for its period that crisis in the fortunes of the Revolution when discords in the Convention encouraged the

Royalists of La Vendée to make a last desperate effort, the story describes the internecine warfare of "Whites" and "Blues"—burnings, pillage, outrages of every sort, relieved by touches of humanity and heroism. It is a fair presentment of the good and bad on both sides, though the balance of virtue remains with the Revolution in the persons of Cimourdain, the stern Commissioner of the Convention, and Gauvain,[1] the Commander of the Republican troops, who at the end sacrifices himself on the guillotine to save his Royalist uncle, the Marquis de Lantenac. But the story, strictly so called, occupies a comparatively small portion of *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*; more important in the author's intention was the opportunity it gave him of discoursing on the persons and politics of that time. And so not only do his Breton peasants hold forth with vast volubility and erudition, but one whole section of the novel, entitled *A Paris*, transports us to the capital and introduces us to the secret councils of the Triumvirate of Terror, likened—pompously but rather inappropriately—to "Minos, Æacus, and Rhadamanthus." In short, the purpose of the book was to justify the Revolution and its methods—a purpose readily understood by the public and illustrated in a well-known caricature by Gill, representing Hugo, with mallet and chisel, engaged in sculpturing the busts of Danton, Marat, and Robespierre.

Quatre-Vingt-Treize was nearly completed when its author returned to Paris in the spring of 1873. During his absence *Marion Delorme* had been put on at the Français (February), and in September *Marie Tudor* was given at the Porte-Saint-Martin. About these and other revivals it must be remembered that Hugo's plays, having been boycotted throughout the eighteen years of the Second Empire, came to the new generation as

[1] Gauvain is the most attractive character in the story, and it may be remembered that Mme. Drouet's rightful name was Julienne Gauvain.

novelties. This fact and the interest felt in the dramatist's personality ensured them a certain measure of success, though it was strictly a *succès d'estime*, for none of them—except *Hernani* and perhaps *Ruy Blas*—obtained any real popularity.

But from the dramas of the stage Hugo was soon recalled again to the tragedy of life, never far absent during his long career, and now brought before him with increasing frequency as one or another passed away of those who had been his friends or acquaintances. Among such was Alexandre Dumas, who had died at the end of 1870, while the enemy was occupying France, and had been interred temporarily at Puys, but whose remains were removed to his native place of Villers-Cotterets, and there ceremoniously buried in the presence of many distinguished people on April 16, 1872. Though prevented from attending the funeral, the poet sent a cordial letter to Dumas *fils* recalling old friendship for his father and appreciation of him. Other losses are referred to in the Diary for 1872, none being more felt than that of Théophile Gautier, on hearing of whose death Hugo sorrowfully wrote: "And now I am the only one left of the men of 1830." But 1873 had in store for him another and nearer sorrow. For some months the condition of his surviving son had been a cause of anxiety. François-Victor—or Victor as he was called by the family—was suffering from a tedious and painful illness which disabled him from all work and made him incapable even of moving without help. In the autumn an improvement was noted when he was staying with his father and the others at Auteuil; but there was a relapse after they returned to Paris, and the invalid was now confined to his rooms in the Rue Drouot, where he was nursed with the greatest devotion by his sister-in-law. No immediate danger was anticipated when suddenly pneumonia set in and the end came in a few hours. Hugo himself—who was about to change houses at the time—was not present when the fatal turn took

place on December 26, and though he hastened at once to the Rue Drouot he found on arriving that his son had just expired. At the funeral in Père-Lachaise on the following Sunday the same scenes were repeated as had marked the obsequies, two years before, of Charles Hugo —scenes which make one realise by contrast that Christian burial has at least the advantage of decency. For now, as then, there was no religious ceremony: in each case a crowd followed the coffin, thronged the cemetery gate and associated Hugo with the Republic in cheers, which on such an occasion were sadly out of place. The chief speaker at the grave was Louis Blanc, whose oration, combining expressions of belief in God and in immortality with other less appropriate topics, was greeted with several outbursts of applause. François-Victor Hugo, who, like his elder brother, died at the age of forty-five, left behind him the reputation of an amiable and reliable man. It was unlikely that either son, overshadowed by such a father, should attain much independent distinction; but both, besides being engaged in journalism,[1] had at times done other literary work of quite average ability. The elder was the author of one or two novels, and a dramatised version of *Les Misérables;* the younger had devoted long years and ceaseless industry to a complete translation of Shakespeare's plays, which was accepted with gratitude by his fellow-countrymen.

[1] In addition to the *Rappel*, a short-lived halfpenny paper—*Le Peuple souverain*—was started in 1872 by the Hugo connection.

CHAPTER XIX

1874–1878

The "grand homme": Growth of Hugolatry: The Academy revisited: How to treat bad laws: Hugo as Senator: His demand for amnesty: *Actes et Paroles*: *La Légende des Siècles* (second series): *L'Art d'être Grand-père*: *L'Histoire d'un Crime*: *Le Pape*: The Voltaire centenary: Evenings in the Rue de Clichy: Hugo as host: Divergent impressions: Some literary opinions

At last, with the beginning of the last stage in Hugo's career, we enter on a period of comparative peace and goodwill. For five and twenty years—ever since the Revolution of 1848—he had been in perpetual conflict, attacking and being attacked; henceforth his life passes gradually into a less contentious course, like a ship which, as it draws near the haven, travels through waters becoming smoother and more smooth. It is no question of any sudden or sensational change, but of a steady tendency among Republicans of every shade—that is, among the majority of his countrymen—to view him with increasing favour and respect, until this sentiment culminated before his death in that extreme form which is commonly spoken of as the "apotheosis" of Hugo. Towards this result the poet himself contributed somewhat by a partial withdrawal from the acrimony of political strife, without, however, relinquishing his opinions or failing to express them, on occasion, with all his usual emphasis. But the cult had its origin in other and independent causes: it was rather a case of the mountain coming to Mahomet than of Mahomet going to the mountain. And among the various elements which may be discerned in its growth,

first and foremost comes the political. The third French Republic, though it had now survived the dangers of infancy, was hardly yet of a constitution robust enough to dispense with any tonic that might fortify it against the attacks of hostile factions. There was no difficulty in finding, to undertake the duties of Government, politicians of respectable ability though without any peculiar capacity for appealing to public imagination. But outside of all ministerial place there was another position, unofficial, unsalaried, which might yet, by the power of sentiment, be a source of strength to the State. All nations, perhaps, like to have their "great man," but we associate the idea and the phrase especially with the French. And the young Republic would—it was instinctively felt—make a braver show if she could display at home and abroad some striking personality as her symbol and figurehead.

Into this position Hugo stepped with the consent of all : for years he had been qualifying for it. No other Frenchman had suffered so obviously for Republican principles as the exile of Guernsey ; no other had a name so well known the world over by his writings and his speeches. Moreover, his Republican faith was not—like that of Thiers and others—a mere passive acceptance of "the form of government which divides us least," but an ardent advocacy of what he declared to be the only possible form for a free and enlightened country. Hugo, therefore, was clearly marked out as "the great man" of the Republic, and his position was strengthened, among a people laudably sensitive to the value of literature, by the fact that he was also "the great poet." At the same time, the latter quality implied some limitation of the former. The majority of those who hailed him as *le grand homme* were far from sharing all his political views. Though a privileged person and entitled to respectful attention, he still seemed to them a visionary and a poet whose function should be strictly ornamental. It was neces-

sary that their admiration, to be secure, should rise above details into the sphere of generality and should be accorded not to the eccentric politician but to the constant champion of Progress against Reaction, of Republicanism against Monarchy and Clericalism. For all these are blessed words and grandly comprehensive. And the idea of *le grand homme* was readily seized, first, by the "man in the street" (who had read *Les Châtiments* and identified its author as the truceless enemy of that *régime* which had brought on France the disasters and disgraces of 1870); secondly, by the populace at large, who in gladly hailing their "great man" were merely returning to him the compliments he had for years lavished on them as the "great people." There was also, of course, the world of literature, in which Hugo's primacy was indisputable; for, though the writers of 1875 had aims and methods very different from those of 1830, there was no denying that one who had been famous while they were yet unborn was still superior to any of them in vigour and versatility. Even if his philosophy was nebulous, his drama unreal, his fiction unobservant of *le petit fait vrai* deemed now so essential for the interpretation of life, yet in poetry—the highest department of literature—he stood unrivalled and was recognised as "the Master" by "Parnassians," "Symbolists," and the Moderns in general, no less than he had been by the poets of his own generation. He was, indeed, not only "the great man" but "the grand old man" of literature, if this phrase of ours may be used to imply a shade of more personal esteem and affection which Emile Augier indicated at the Press banquet of 1880 when he toasted the guest of the evening as *le Père*—the father of all literary France. And we can easily believe that a similar feeling softened some even of those to whom Hugo's opinions were most distasteful, but who were touched by human sympathy when they regarded his years, the vicissitudes and the distinction of his career, the successive blows of fortune

which had left him in a solitary and childless old age.

In these various ways, political, literary, and personal, did Victor Hugo come into his own—and rather more than his own. Precision of date is hardly possible in dealing with a sentiment like Hugolatry, but there is a certain fitness in connecting it with the beginning of 1874, when the poet had just moved into 21 Rue de Clichy, where he soon began to receive and entertain more extensively than he had done since the days of the Place Royale. It was not his habit—as we have seen before—to seek solace in seclusion, and within a month or so of his son's death we find him up and about. An interesting date is January 20, when he revisited the Academy—the first time for twenty-two years. In the latter part of Louis-Philippe's reign he had been fairly frequent in his attendance on election or reception days, and had even at other times assisted occasionally in the leisurely labours of the Academic Dictionary, in the course of which he had one or two sharp passages with that eminent purist, Cousin, who objected to the inclusion of any words not sanctioned by the use of the classic authors of Louis XIV.'s age. But all that was a long while ago, and Hugo had not set foot inside the Palais Mazarin since December 1, 1851—the eve of the *coup d'état*. Much was changed since then—even the room in which the Forty deliberated was in a different part of the building. Let us quote the Diary :

"When I reached the door one of the doorkeepers said, 'No admission,' but the other remarked, 'It is M. Victor Hugo'; and they let me pass. The proceedings were beginning. I was the last to arrive, and, signing the attendance-sheet, I sat down at the end of the long table on the right of the door. According to custom members had to declare formally that they had not pledged their votes. The Director for the current quarter, M. Duvergier de Hauranne, put the question to each in turn : 'M. le Comte d'Haussonville, M. Thiers, M. Jules Favre,

M. le Duc d'Aumale' . . . &c., and each replied 'No.' He saw me, but did not recognise me, and passing on to my right-hand neighbour he continued: 'M. Saint-René Taillandier.' . . . Then some one called out, 'Why, you are forgetting M. Victor Hugo.' 'I must apologise,' said the Director, 'I did not notice him.' Such was the manner of my return to the Academy. There were eight or ten votings, the result being eventually to fill the three vacant places by the election of MM. Mézières, Alexandre Dumas *fils*, and Caro. The business lasted, in all, an hour. At 1.15 I left; MM. Legouvé, Camille Doucet, Rémusat, and d'Haussonville came up to greet me. In the courtyard was a double line of spectators, who saluted me as they had done when I went in."

From this modest account we may infer that Hugo's reappearance at the Institute made no great sensation. A shade of disappointment may perhaps be detected in the words, "Such was the manner of my return to the Academy." But obviously his visit was unexpected and unobtrusive; and though some of his colleagues did not see him, while others possibly did not want to see him, to the majority of the younger generation he would naturally be a stranger. We have to remember, too, the rigid etiquette of undemonstrativeness which—unlike anything else in French life—governs Academical proceedings. Not that the question matters much, for the poet's interests had long ceased to lie in that direction, and during the rest of his life his visits were few and far between; indeed, he did not disguise his opinion that the Academy was too oligarchic for him, and that he would prefer such a body to be chosen by popular election.

In February *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* was published. At the same time Hugo divided between the three Committees of Relief for the people of Alsace and Lorraine the proceeds—about £180—from the sale of his verses on *La Libération du Territoire* (which had appeared in pamphlet form in the previous September, and which were

eventually included in the posthumous collection entitled *Toute la Lyre*). At the end of March he was concerned with a subscription for Rochefort, who had escaped from his confinement and now wrote from Sydney to ask for funds. Pecuniary aid for political prisoners and *évadés*, being strictly illegal, had to be managed quietly, but Hugo boldly advocated an open and public subscription list, with a preamble to this effect : " A law which proscribes fraternity and penalises pity is a bad law. We, the undersigned, despise it and violate it." The other subscribers, however, demurred, it seems, to this heroic form of anarchism which would have entailed a prosecution. Ethically, no doubt, Hugo was right when he said that it is more honourable to break laws openly than surreptitiously ; but it does not seem to have occurred to him—and the oversight is characteristic—that the principle of breaking any law which you may consider bad would, if generally adopted, have rather perplexing consequences—even in " the United States of Europe."

The poet at this moment was, as he had been since 1871, an unattached politician. He had resolved not to seek again to enter the Assembly, but when a Senate was added to the Constitution (1875) he gladly accepted the honour of representing the Department of the Seine. The fact, however, did not signify any active resumption of politics. In the Senate—where of course he sat and voted with the Republican Left—Hugo contented himself with a very modest part, for though he remained a Senator until his death, it does not appear that he spoke, in all, on more than four occasions. There was, indeed, only one subject in which he retained a vital interest, and it was on this subject that three out of his four speeches were made. To all the imprisonments and transportations which had followed the suppression of the Communist rising, and many of which were still running their long course, he desired earnestly that an end should be put ; and he brought

forward a motion to that effect in his first sensational speech on May 22, 1876. "Amnesty," he said, "is what I ask for—full and complete amnesty, without conditions and without reserves: there is no other amnesty worthy of the name. . . . Civil war is a fault in which all have some share. Do you ask, 'Who began it?' the answer is, 'All, and no one' . . ." He then proceeded to enlarge on his favourite theme of "Paris, the great and admirable Paris, the capital of the world," and while admitting the crimes of the Communists, to palliate them as disasters for which no one was really responsible. It was an unfortunate line to take—a feeble sophism to make play with. The speech, which—though read—was excellently delivered in the way of intonation and emphasis, met with the respectful hearing due to a *grand homme;* but it was begun, continued, and ended in the midst of a frigid silence more damning than the liveliest signs of disapproval. When the orator sat down, no one rose either to support his proposals or to combat them, and when the voting took place only ten members were in favour of them.

This is the last of Hugo's political speeches to which we need refer, but a word must be given to the publication at this time (1875–1876) of *Actes et Paroles*—the collection of his public utterances and manifestoes since 1841. The work took the form of three volumes—each with an introductory essay—entitled respectively *Avant l'Exil, Pendant l'Exil,* and *Après l'Exil.* From this division it will be seen that Hugo made his exile the central point of his whole career, and in so doing he was well inspired, from a practical no less than from an artistic point of view. For it was his exile that supplied most obviously the standard by which he measured himself and by which he desired that the world should measure him—as, above all, a man of conscience and principle. Such a work—a sort of *Apologia pro vita mea*—naturally involves a certain exercise of legitimate discretion in matters of order and selection, and in this

respect *Actes et Paroles* is a well-arranged book. But there are in it traces of another discretion not quite so legitimate, in the shape of various little additions, suppressions and explanations—such as we have had occasion to notice before—all tending to produce the impression which the author desired rather than that which might possibly be formed from a wholly impartial view of his deeds and words : in this respect, also, *Actes et Paroles* is decidedly a well-arranged book.

In the next year (1877) no fewer than three new works appeared, though the word "new" does not necessarily mean "newly written." For Hugo, it must be remembered, had a considerable stock in hand—books that he had written either wholly or in part during his exile ; and these, supplemented by the regular morning work of every day, which he continued now as before, ensured a supply sufficient to last until his death and for some years afterwards. Thus, of the three works published in 1877, two had been lying ready for some time. One of these was the second series of *La Légende des Siècles*, composed for the most part during the last year or two of the Guernsey period. Its reception confirms once more the common belief that the attempt to repeat a masterpiece is seldom successful. What people felt about this second *Légende* was—briefly—that the poet was not breaking new ground but simply going back over the old, that he was saying again what he had said before and saying it in tones more sombre—certainly more didactic and preachy. The first *Légende* had its full share of crimes and horrors, but the bright patches were distinct and numerous ; here the atmosphere seemed one of almost unrelieved gloom. "Woe unto thee, O Man," might be written as the text of the whole—Man the earth-worm, hopelessly low in the scale of creation, inferior to this planet and far inferior to each one in the hierarchy of heavenly bodies which gradually ascend into the infinite, and somewhere beyond the highest of which is the Deity removed from Man by im-

measurable gulfs. All this, besides being depressing, had the more fatal defect of being dull. It was true that from their heavy and cumbrous setting some gems might be extricated (such as *Petit Paul, Jean Chouan, L'Aigle du Casque, Le Cimetière d'Eylau,* and a few others), but their beauty only increased the reader's regret that these two volumes did not justify their title by containing more legend and less philosophy.

Three months afterwards—as if to satisfy all tastes and show how easily he could change from grave to gay—Hugo gave to the world that one which, of all his later works, has been the most read and admired. Childhood and children he had often treated in his poetry, and always in his happiest vein; now he devoted to them, as personified in his two grandchildren, the volume of verse entitled *L'Art d'être Grand-père.* The grandfather playing with the little ones, petting them and spoiling them, taking them to the Zoo, delighting them with wonderful stories about the animals there and various other strange beasts—such a theme gives ample scope to the most pleasing side of the poet's fancy, besides supplying him—as he reminds us in the opening piece, *Victor sed victus*—with an effective contrast in the idea of the great man as the slave of the little child. It is all very cleverly done—if anything, too cleverly; for Hugo's simplicity seems often a laboured simplicity, and is overwhelmed now and then beneath his chronic passion for digression and controversy. To lug in with abusive epithets the names of critics who years ago had offended him; to slay once again his enemies the priests, "those black pigmies"; to attack the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on the ground that it cast a slur on motherhood—what on earth have these things to do with the "art of being a grandfather"? Apart from such defects of taste—and "good taste" was one of those classic conventions which Hugo had long since discarded—it is an amiable old man as well as a consummate artist who disports himself in these pages.

The third work which appeared in 1877 is *L'Histoire d'un Crime*—a book already dealt with at the period to which it refers. For twenty-five years it had reposed in the author's desk and was now (October) published, with a brief and oracular preface: "This book is more than timely, it is urgent. I publish it.—V.H." The meaning of which is to be found in an impression, widely prevalent at the time, that there existed a plot to overthrow the Republic—an impression which derived some colour from Marshal MacMahon's sudden dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies. As a counterblast to this scheme—if any such scheme there was—*L'Histoire d'un Crime* recalled the iniquities of the *coup d'état* of 1851, though its manner of recalling them was—as we have seen—one which could not fail to remind readers that the word "*histoire*" does not necessarily mean "history."

Hugo's next book was one of topical interest, though not political. The election of Leo XIII. to the Papacy in succession to Pius IX. gave occasion for a poetic dialogue entitled *Le Pape* (April 1878), in which the Pontiff falls asleep and in a dream sees himself going about the world, humbly clad, with all his state laid aside, talking with every class of men, preaching mercy and justice and doing good unto all—in short, conducting himself as he would if his sentiments were those of Victor Hugo. But alas! there is no chance of that; it is only a dream, and a "horrid dream" too—as the Pope says with a shudder, when he wakes up. It was not out of the Vatican, we may be sure, that Hugo expected any good thing to come: to find the real representative of Christian principles he looked in a very different direction. A month after the publication of *Le Pape* occurred the hundredth anniversary of Voltaire's death (May 30, 1878), and the poet, in whose eyes all progress must be dated from the Great Revolution, made haste to acclaim the man whose teaching had done so much to bring about that event, as the one

who more than any other had "completed the work of the Gospel." This and much more to the same effect was said in an oration—or panegyric—on Voltaire delivered at the Gaîté Theatre on May 30, in which the philosopher—whom Hugo had once pilloried as "sophist," "serpent," "ape," "the devil's ambassador," &c.—was now held up to admiration as the tender-hearted friend of humanity, the genuine successor of Christ and the disciples. Compelled to a choice, one might prefer the later judgment to the earlier, though here—as usually—Hugo, in presenting us with two contrary opinions, leaves us only the option of deciding which of the two is the less absurd.

During all this time—for now nearly five years—the poet had been residing at 21 Rue de Clichy, where he occupied a flat on the fourth story and had with him his two grandchildren as well as their mother (Charles Hugo's widow), who had now married again, and her husband, M. Charles Lockroy. In the flat beneath lived Mme. Drouet, whose rooms were always at Hugo's disposal for the entertainment of his friends, while she herself was there a dignified hostess, with her classic features framed in silvery hair, beautiful in her old age as she had been beautiful in her youth. And there was no lack of hospitality. Once or twice each week there was a dinner-party followed by a reception; on other evenings intimate friends often looked in to pay their respects. The "great man" himself seldom went out in the evenings. "I am like the bear in the Jardin des Plantes—I never dine away from home," so he wrote to a friend in declining an invitation, and added, "the truth is, I feel wretched when I have not my little ones with me." And the grandchildren were, of course, much to the fore on all occasions, having their places at table and not retiring to bed until after dessert. M. Georges Hugo has recalled some of the distinguished people he met at that tender age, such as Cladel, Monselet, Flaubert, De Banville, Leconte de Lisle,

Louis Blanc, Spuller, Gambetta: the last named, he remembers, "arriving late when we were already at table, and in his impetuous way lifting up my sister and myself in his arms, kissing our cheeks and squeezing us nearly to suffocation." But it would be useless to enumerate the visitors or guests of the Rue de Clichy. Hugo himself has given (in *Choses Vues*) a rather pompous catalogue to show the number and variety of those he used to receive in the old days of the Place Royale, among whom figure "princes, dukes, presidents of Republics (like Manin), makers of Revolutions (like Louis Blanc), leaders of nations (like Garibaldi and Kossuth), artists and actors, cardinals and bishops, field-marshals and sergeants, ambassadors and peasants," and so on. The frequenters of the Rue de Clichy were also, no doubt, numerous and diversified, including most of the notables in politics, literature, and art, though there were not so many "leaders of nations" going about now as in the stirring time of forty years ago, while as to "cardinals and bishops"—the evolution of Hugo must have made their presence in his house hardly possible. But in one respect at least the *salon* of the Rue de Clichy resembled the earlier one of the Place Royale—in the boundless admiration and homage which were accorded to the master of the house. "When my grandfather spoke," says M. Georges Hugo, "he was listened to with a religious silence"; or—as another witness puts it—"All lend to the Master's words an attentive ear, all hold themselves in a respectful attitude," while he, seated usually on a green velvet couch to the right of the fireplace, in the *salon rouge*, received the "tribute of senators and deputies, poets and painters, novelists and journalists . . . gracious and affable to all, talking and laughing with them, just as if they were his equals and his comrades." Such condescension was all the more welcome, because it appears that there was something peculiarly awe-inspiring in the great man's presence, if we may believe that even such a personage as the Emperor of

Brazil as he approached Hugo one evening was observed to show marked nervousness, and was heard to say, "Now you must encourage me, M. Victor Hugo, for I feel rather frightened." To ladies the old poet's manner was always courtly and deferential. "Whenever a lady entered he would rise to greet her, and respectfully kissing her hand, would conduct her to a seat, before returning to resume his conversation. Later in the evening he would escort them to the *salle à manger*, where the company adjourned for light refreshments; and when about midnight people departed, he would conduct his guests to the hall, and advising the ladies to wrap themselves up well, would himself assist them to put on their cloaks."

These and such-like details may be gathered from the accounts of those who, being admitted in a more or less confidential capacity to Hugo's intimacy, wrote under a due sense of their own unworthiness and his greatness —accounts which are of course wholly partial and in their tone of exaggerated deference, not to say servility, often difficult to read without a smile. What are we to say, for example, of a sentence like this, which one comes upon in the most elaborate and typical of these works,[1] when, speaking of the strong sentiments which Hugo delivered against those whom he disliked, the writer says: "A *Moi immense* pervaded all these passionate words—a *Moi* which seemed to be the expression of collective humanity"? Against such egregious adulation we have to set the less complimentary opinions of those who found the atmosphere of the Rue de Clichy too thick with the fumes of incense, and whose reminiscences imply that the eternal topic of Hugo's merits became rather oppressive. Thus some complained that it was necessary always to speak to the great man of himself, while others

[1] *Victor Hugo et son temps*, by A. Barbou, which claims to have had the authority and approval of the Master, and which certainly seems to justify that claim by its guileless repetition of all the Hugo "legends."

commented satirically on the amazing appetite for praise shown by one who, not satisfied with the refined compliments of cultured admirers, would swallow with quite as much relish the coarsest flattery of any outsider who came along. It was naturally the young who waxed most exuberant, and these Hugo repaid by a geniality which was sometimes in excess of sincerity. We have not a word to say against the good-nature which encourages a literary aspirant by the assumption of a vivid interest in what he has written; yet the young author must have been considerably embarrassed when —as happened more than once—he found himself credited with literary opinions of which he was wholly innocent, but which the Master chose *a priori* to attribute to him, and then proceeded to make the text for a discourse of his own. In such a case it would be equally impolitic and useless to protest to Hugo that he was mistaken. For the great man did not like being set right; things ought to be as he supposed them to be. In witness whereof there is the occasion when he remarked to some one: "The only thing Goethe ever wrote of any value is his *Wallenstein*." And when the person he was addressing was rash enough to observe that the author of *Wallenstein* was not Goethe but Schiller, Hugo somewhat testily replied: "Schiller or Goethe—it makes no difference. I have never read a word of either of them—it is not worth the trouble!" And this is, perhaps, the place to recall the well-known story of Turguenef, who tells how, one evening, "amid a knot of admirers striving to outdo each other in eulogy of their host's genius, some one declared that the street Hugo lived in ought to be known by his name. Whereupon another at once remarked that the street was too small and insignificant for such a distinction; some more conspicuous part of the town should be selected. Then, after various localities—each more imposing than the last—had been suggested as appropriate, one young enthusiast exclaimed that no single

spot was worthy of the honour, but that the whole city of Paris ought to bear the name of its great poet. Leaning against the mantelpiece Hugo had stood listening complacently to these increasing bids of flattery : suddenly, turning to the last speaker, he said, approvingly and in a tone of serious reflection : 'Well, that will come, my friend, that will come ! ' "

In quoting these anecdotes—selected as extremes—one would not exaggerate their significance, remembering that the cult of all celebrities lends itself to absurdity, and that Hugo is neither the first nor the last of those who have been rendered ridiculous by the combined efforts of themselves and their devotees. Such little incidents would not—save to the querulous few—detract from the pleasures of the evening or from the interest of hearing the Master hold forth in his best *ex cathedra* fashion, as one who spoke with an authority which exempted him from the trouble of giving reasons for his pronouncements. Art and Literature were naturally favourite topics—the former signifying Painting and Sculpture, on both which Hugo was something of an expert. Music, on the contrary, did not appeal to him : it was, he said, an " inferior art " ; and if he tolerated the conventional piano it was merely from politeness or from interest in the performer. At the same time he had no objection to his verses being set to music—as a vast number of the shorter pieces were—and sung in concert halls and drawing-rooms.

On literary subjects it was rather his way to settle by intuition the merits of an author with whose works he disclaimed any acquaintance in detail. His remark, quoted above, about Goethe and Schiller, illustrates this foible, though it may be suspected that his lofty nescience was somewhat affected and that he had read a good deal more of German literature than he acknowledged. The same observation applies, in a much less degree, to his professed ignorance of English, on which we have commented before. Not but what we would,

in fairness, credit Hugo with some genuine ignorance—in cases, perhaps, where he had no desire to proclaim it; and those who once heard him blandly speculating on a possible connection between the French word *ironie* and the English word *iron* must have smiled a large smile at this unconscious revelation of the Master's limited researches into the Greek language. On the other hand, he was no doubt well versed in the Romance literatures—in Latin, in Spanish, and of course in French, on which he spoke with a legitimate authority. Unlike many old men, he was no bigoted praiser of the past, preferring to regard himself as the first of the moderns—the source and example of all the younger poets who thronged around him. His own dislikes were strong and well known. Thus, among the authors of the so-called "golden" age, he had never a good word to say for Bossuet or for Racine, the former of whom he considered as personifying the spirit of monarchy and clericalism, while he pronounced the latter "a third-rate writer, essentially a *bourgeois* poet." The severity of this latter judgment—a survival of the iconoclasm of 1830—caused so much surprise that ill-natured people persisted in attributing it to the fact that a few perverse critics had once dared to assert that Racine as a poet was superior to Victor Hugo. In forming his opinion of contemporaries "the great man" confided to some one that as a rule he read only one book of each, which was sufficient to guide him. Whether this remark included Balzac, for whom he professed the warmest admiration, we do not know; but Flaubert and George Sand were quoted as examples—the one a frequent visitor at the Rue de Clichy, the other a constant friend and correspondent, and both, as authors, enjoying the Master's high opinion. But this one-book method, though convenient, seems rather insecure: to ordinary people at any rate *Madame Bovary* would throw little light on the qualities of *Salammbô*, while George Sand's *Indiana*

would hardly be an index to her later styles of fiction. Then there were certain pet aversions. One of them was Prosper Mérimée—a case no doubt of personal and political dislike involving literary depreciation; and another, Taine—or rather that philosopher's system of treating moral and social phenomena with the same statistical and inductive precision as may be applied to physical. No one troubles much about Taine nowadays: otherwise we should be with Hugo in his indignation at the fallacious half-truth that "virtue and vice are products just as much as sugar and vitriol—a sentiment worthy of a grocer." And it was a good hit at the often exaggerated importance of the *petit fait* when, one evening at dinner, he remarked to a friend: "Now, if M. Taine happened to be at my table he would not fail to observe that I am using a silk pocket-handkerchief, and on that detail he would base a theory as to my habits and character; whereas the truth is that I only use a silk handkerchief two or three times a year—when I happen to have a cold and to have run out of my linen ones."

It may also be added that Hugo's appreciation of Balzac did not extend to the latest development of realism in fiction. In 1877 every one was discussing *L'Assommoir*, a book which—while recognising its good intentions—he disapproved of on the ground that "a novelist has no right to present human misfortune in its nudity." And in regard to the "naturalist" school in general his attitude was the same. "Why," he asked, "go *down?* It is, you say, to arrive at truth. But surely elevated ideas are not less true, and personally I prefer them." He then quoted, or paraphrased, the passage from *The Merchant of Venice* in which Shylock meditates on the like human nature of Christian and Jew ("Hath not a Jew eyes? . . . And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?") The comparison, he observed, was pursued by reference to the instincts, the affections, the passions: it might obviously have followed a descending scale, such as, "They cough like

us, we spit like them," and so into any gross details ; but the latter method would be no more true than the former. Not that Hugo had any dislike for audacity, whether in form or matter : he was far from squeamish, and one of his favourite axioms was that "sobriety in literature is the mark of a feeble stomach." His objection to naturalism was simply its superfluous nastiness.

CHAPTER XX

1878–1882

Hugo's robust health : Serious illness in summer of 1878 : Guernsey revisited : Hugo's *galanterie* : Mme. Drouet and others : The last *affaire de cœur* : Return to Paris : Change of house : Life in the Avenue d'Eylau : *La Pitié suprême* : *Religion et Religions* : *L'Ane* : *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit* : *Torquemada*

NOTHING surprised Hugo's friends more than his unabated vigour of mind and body. Except for his grey hairs there was no sign of age about him: at seventy-five his habits hardly differed from those of a healthy man in the prime of life. In the Rue de Clichy, as during his exile and before it, he rose betimes and worked steadily for some hours before the *déjeuner*, standing mostly while he wrote, and disdaining closed windows, arm-chairs, and all the little comforts of old age. In the afternoons he would sometimes go for a drive, the carriage of Mme. Tola Dorian or some other friend being always at his disposal; more often he preferred to ramble about Paris on his own account, and there was nothing he enjoyed more than a long ride on the top of a bus; but, whether walking or driving, he still resolutely refused to encumber himself with overcoat or umbrella. Another sign of vitality was evident in an unimpaired appetite and digestion. Hugo had always played a good knife and fork, and his capacity in this respect—including a special fondness for extremely underdone meat—was one of the many characteristics to which his admirers applied their favourite epithet of "leonine."

No troublesome necessity for carefulness of diet had

as yet been felt; and it must have been a brave sight, alike for the children and their elders, to see "Pa-papa" crunching up with his sound strong teeth the claw of a lobster, or dealing with an orange by the simple method of first peeling off the outer skin and then putting the fruit whole into his mouth and devouring it—pulp, pips and all.

So much, indeed, had the old man's robust health come to be regarded as a matter of course that his family were quite unprepared for a sudden and sharp illness which attacked him at the end of June (1878). The chief symptom of this—Nature's first serious warning to "go easy"—was fever, followed by extreme prostration and torpor: its immediate cause seems to have been the excitement of a long and heated discussion with Louis Blanc on the evening of June 27. The subject on which the two old friends differed—and Louis Blanc was one of the very few who could boldly differ from the great man without thereby forfeiting his friendship—was the claim of J. J. Rousseau to be honoured equally with Voltaire as an apostle of Freedom—a claim against which Hugo vigorously protested, regarding "Jean-Jacques" as only a second-rate apostle. The argument, continued after the other guests had gone, was prolonged until past midnight, without either of the disputants having made any impression on the other; and when Hugo retired to bed, he was in a state of nervous irritation which foretold a restless night. Next day his condition of collapse alarmed the family into sending for Dr. Allix, who at once enjoined complete rest and "no visitors." Soon afterwards a consultation was held: the medical men spoke of "cerebral congestion," and evidently feared a seizure. The invalid, they said, had been overtaxing his strength: it was desirable to get him away at once from the excitements of Paris to some quiet place which would give him a thorough change. It was easy enough to diagnose the case and to prescribe for it: the difficulty

was to induce Hugo to follow advice—especially medical advice. He had always pooh-poohed doctors and medicines, and preferred to treat his ailments—few and trifling if we except the throat trouble—by ignoring them until they disappeared. Even on this occasion, though he confessed to feeling "dazed" (*étonné*) and "tired," it was certain that he would resent and resist any authoritative pressure, accustomed as he was not to obey but to be obeyed. Moreover he had, as will presently appear, certain reasons for not wishing to leave Paris at this moment. However, as he could not be coerced he was coaxed, and after two or three days of domestic diplomacy, in which the grandchildren were taught to play their part, he agreed to go for a fortnight or so to his house in Guernsey. Thither accordingly the whole family (including M. and Mme. Lockroy, Mme. Drouet, and Richard Lesclide the secretary) set out on July 4, travelling *via* Granville. From the Press, always on the look-out for Hugo's movements, his illness was carefully concealed, and a paragraph was sent round to the papers simply stating that the poet, accompanied by a few friends, had gone for a short visit to the seaside.

To these ostensible reasons for a rather hurried departure another has to be added which necessitates a reference to the less pleasing side of Hugo's domestic life. None of his immediate circle was more anxious to get him away from Paris than Mme. Drouet. This lady's long and faithful devotion to the poet might well have entitled her to an equal fidelity on his part. Both, moreover, had reached the stage when love usually ceases to be a perturbing element: they had been young and they were now old: gladly one would imagine them—like Philemon and Baucis, or Darby and Joan—sitting by the fireside and exchanging tender memories of the past. Unhappily this idyllic picture was not always realised: what should have been the calm of life's twilight was sometimes broken by storms and tempests It may have been a natural, but it was certainly an

inconvenient, effect of Hugo's remarkable vitality that his taste for *galanterie* was prolonged to a period at which most men have put away these vanities. His friends spoke admiringly of his "eternal youth"—flattery may even have quoted *cruda deo viridisque senectus*—but poor Juliette would fain have seen her lover less eternally youthful and more inclined to grow old becomingly. This sort of trouble—ultimately the conflict between polygamous Man and monogamous Woman—was nothing new: it had recurred at intervals for the last thirty years, though circumstances tended rather to aggravate it since Hugo's return to France. For one thing, the poet, amid his vast correspondence—much of it from total strangers—received a considerable number of tender effusions from ladies, young or otherwise, who, fascinated by his poetry or by the heroes of his fiction and drama, yearned to lay their love and adoration at his feet. He was not the man either to ignore these flattering overtures or to treat them with a purely paternal benevolence. Such letters—though they passed in the first instance through the hands of a most discreet secretary—he usually answered himself, and sometimes the correspondence developed into an acquaintance, and the acquaintance into a romance. Against these diversions of genius—or whatever else we are to call them—Mme. Drouet of course protested bitterly as soon as she discovered them; and discover them she generally did, since no precautions can baffle for long the keen scent of a jealous woman unhampered by any sort of scruple. Much as he may have resented his mistress's inquisitorial methods—the ransacking of his desks, papers, and so on—the poet seems as a rule to have followed the line of least resistance: that is to say, he denied when possible; otherwise he confessed, apologised, and promised not to do it again—doubtless with a mental reservation that he would take more care next time. But there were occasions when he flared up, adopted an impenitent tone and returned

taunt for taunt, or else argued the matter with reference to what was "just" and "reasonable," as though he had forgotten that those words are meaningless in the quarrels of love. To prevent such distressing scenes became naturally an object of the family, and as no one dared to expostulate with the great man, their united efforts were diverted either to keeping Mme. Drouet in the dark or to pacifying her—as the case might be. In fact, sympathy does not appear to have been on her side. It was felt that she strained her rights too far, and that in indulging her grievances—real or imaginary—she often displayed an intolerable lack of self-restraint.[1] People remembered how differently Mme. Hugo had borne herself under similar or greater trials. Both women were devoted to Hugo, both had to endure the mortification of knowing him unfaithful, both remained constant in their love to the end; but the contrast between the dignified resignation of the wife and the volcanic violence of the mistress was all to the disadvantage of the latter. And yet it must not be supposed that the poet ever seriously contemplated parting from his friend. Moments of revolt no doubt he had against her severe monopoly; and when, in a revulsion of feeling following upon some outburst of wrath, she retired to her room and wrote him one of those passionate love-letters she had been writing for forty years, his satisfaction may perhaps have been tinged by some slight sense of weariness—for men grow tired of romance, women never. But the idea of separation was one he could not face: she was indispensable to him, and he no less to her. More than once, after a scene of jealousy, she announced her intention of

[1] As when one evening at a dinner-party a very pretty woman in the course of earnest conversation with the poet leaned over close to him and said: "Ah! cher maître! que je voudrais donc vous toucher!" Whereupon Mme. Drouet sharply interposed with: "Eh! Madame, il ne vous touche que trop!" (*Victor Hugo intime*, by Mme. Richard Lesclide.)

leaving him for ever, and did leave him—for a day or two. On one occasion when with a purpose apparently irrevocable she had gone off to pack her boxes, Mme. Lockroy—who played the part of peacemaker—said to Hugo: "This time, I believe she really means to go, and if she does, what will you do, father?" "I shall go after her," said the old man gloomily. A confession, pathetic if you will, that there are some chains which cannot be broken. Other women might come and go—if Hugo was responsible for their coming, Mme. Drouet saw to their going—but none of these fleeting fancies could shake the dominion of the one woman who was an essential part of the poet's life.

From this retrospect the "judicious reader"—as they used to say—may infer that a further element in the crisis of June 1878 was supplied by an *affaire de cœur*. That is so; indeed, there were two or three sentimental affairs going on simultaneously and one in particular which was more than sentimental—the one which, without betraying any secret, we may describe as the *affaire Blanche*, that being the name of the young lady who has the distinction of being the last among the objects of the poet's affection. They are not very edifying—these amorous adventures of a patriarchal Don Juan—nor are they even amusing: yet one has to admit that there are some of Hugo's admirers who not only excuse them but apparently find in them an additional title to esteem, on the ground that—to put it briefly—"such amiable weaknesses show us how truly human the great man was, when, 'oppressed by the burden of his glory,' he sought relief in the love of Blanche, or Eugénie, or Ernestine!'" It is sufficient to recognise among other curiosities of Hugo-worship that this point of view exists, without professing in the least to understand it, or to see how our opinion of one who posed as the instructor of mankind can possibly be exalted by knowing that at the venerable age of seventy-seven he was engaged in an intrigue with a servant-girl.

For such, in effect—though superior, as we are told, to her position—was Blanche when she first attracted the poet's notice; no mysterious *inconnue* (like the "Claire" of an earlier date) but living in Mme. Drouet's service as lady's-maid. Before long, Madame, having become uneasy, dismissed her, whereupon Hugo established her in rooms and was visiting her regularly at the time we have reached. Though Mme. Drouet had as yet no certain knowledge, she suspected something of the sort, and for that reason alone was anxious to get Hugo away from Paris. Her efforts, combined with those of the rest, were—as we have seen—successful; and this was the beginning of the end of the *affaire Blanche,* from which Juliette of course came out ultimately victorious.[1]

It was no easy task that Hugo's retinue undertook when they had conveyed him away from the heat and noise of Paris to the freshness and quietude of Guernsey. He needed delicate handling just now; for, while it was a dire offence even to hint that he was out of sorts, it was quite evident that he was not only in bad health but in bad temper too, and in spite of his usual geniality to those around him he could, we are assured, be very

[1] At Guernsey the poet managed, though with difficulty, to keep up some slight correspondence with Blanche, but after his return to Paris a renewal of the *liaison* led to such turbulent scenes with Mme. Drouet that Hugo, conscious at last perhaps of the need for a quiet life, explained his position to the girl—who seems to have been genuinely attached to him—and persuaded her that for the present they had better not meet. Time passed, the separation continued, and Blanche—who had been started in a little shop—eventually married some one of her own station. But her troubles did not end here. The man turned out to be a scoundrel and used the knowledge which his wife confided to him of her former attachment for the purpose of blackmailing Hugo at intervals. Disgusted with his conduct she parted from him; and henceforth, without ever intruding upon her distinguished lover, she was seen occasionally—a pathetic figure—waiting about to catch a distant glimpse of him or to ask tidings of him from Lesclide, Meurice, or other of his friends, who always treated her with the utmost kindness, while taking care that there should be no renewal of her friendship with Hugo—not even after Mme. Drouet's death. (*Victor Hugo intime,* by Mme. Richard Lesclide.)

disagreeable at times. Happily the change of air and surroundings soon had a beneficial effect. In his own Hauteville House, amid so much of his own handiwork, and in the familiar walks and drives about the island, the old man's strength returned and his spirits revived; while, to keep him interested and amused, relays of visitors came—the Meurices, the Saint-Victors, the Lefèvres, &c. Thus time passed and the stay of three weeks—the limit which Hugo had originally fixed—had been prolonged to one of more than three months before the question of returning to Paris was raised. But now he began to talk about coming elections, Senatorial and Academical, at which he desired to be present: the shortening days, too, and less favourable weather began to be irksome; it was certain that he would not consent to remain much longer in the island. The move, as it happened, was delayed by a partial relapse which occurred about the middle of October, much to the disappointment of all who had hoped that the poet's health was now re-established. As usual, he would not admit that anything was the matter, but the frequent fits of depression to which he was now subject alarmed his family, as did the serious view taken by the local doctor—an old friend of the Hugos—who evidently regarded the present symptoms as marking the beginning of a complete break-up—an opinion which the Paris doctors had also formed in the summer, though it proved in both cases to be erroneous. For the invalid was soon sufficiently convalescent to allow of his departure being fixed for November 9. Mme. Lockroy, indeed, convinced that Paris was not the best place either for her father-in-law or for her children, suggested the charms of Florence or Naples as a winter residence; but in vain. Hugo did not rise to this proposal, and the original plan held good.

The return, however, was to be attended by one important change in the poet's life. For some time his friends had been anxious to transplant him from the

cramped quarters of the Rue de Clichy to some spacious country house well outside of Paris, and they were particularly attracted by a villa at Bellevue which was now in the market. But as Hugo flatly refused to go so far out, Meurice and Vacquerie, who were acting for him, had to be content with the sort of modified *rus in urbe* which was afforded by the then unformed neighbourhood of the Avenue d'Eylau, airy by its proximity to the Bois de Boulogne, and remote enough—it was hoped—to diminish the influx of importunate visitors. Here accordingly a house—No. 130 as it then was, until the renaming and renumbering of that part of the avenue—was taken for the poet and Mme. Drouet, while the adjoining 132 was suitable for M. and Mme. Lockroy. In these arrangements Hugo acquiesced, though without any keen interest; whether because at his time of life change is in itself wearisome, or because he shrank from venturing on a house which he had not himself chosen. Glowing accounts of its delights left him unmoved, and it was rather in the mood of a martyr that he entered what was to be the last of his many dwelling-places. Everything had been done before his arrival to mitigate the feeling of strangeness. The furniture from the Rue de Clichy had been arranged, as far as possible, in its accustomed manner: in the Master's large and lofty bedroom—which he would often use also for writing—all his comforts had been carefully studied; while in the library, curled up in his favourite arm-chair, the pet cat "Gavroche" created an unmistakable impression of at-homeness. Before long the move proved to have been in all ways for the better. The new residence, besides being a house instead of a flat and situated in an open instead of a crowded neighbourhood, had also the great advantage of a well-laid-out garden containing trees, flowers, and a cascade of fresh water. Its internal accommodation was ample, since on the ground floor alone there were four rooms—two *salons*, library, and dining-room—while on

the first floor, in addition to Hugo's study, were found the inevitable *salon rouge* and *salon bleu*, the latter of which was used by Mme. Drouet as her boudoir. The furniture and the adornments—exhibiting Hugo's usual fondness for blend of Oriental and Western styles—were sumptuous and tasteful, as may be gathered from any of the accounts which have described them in detail.[1]

The beginning of 1879 found things fairly settled. The poet's health was practically restored, and as his long absence from Paris had given rise to various strange rumours, the most effective way to contradict these was that he should show himself in public. And so the dinners and receptions of the Rue de Clichy were resumed in the Avenue d'Eylau, though with some changes intended to secure for the Master more quiet than he had had of recent years. Thus, he was no longer "at home" on any and every evening, but definite invitations were issued and certain days were allotted to different classes of guests—politicians, literary people, personal friends. Such at least was the arrangement during the first year or two. As time went on and Hugo grew older, there was a tendency to dispense more and more with formality and to abridge both the number and the duration of social "functions"; but at the outset the new establishment lacked nothing of pomp and circumstance. Here the Master held his *salon*—or, as many still preferred to call it, his "court"—in Literature and in Politics. To the latter he attached much importance, aspiring to make his house the neutral ground of conflicting opinions and thus to promote the work of unity. How far he succeeded is doubtful, for Deputies at daggers drawn were not likely to be won over to each other's views by having exchanged formal greetings beneath the smile of "Olympio," and listened to words of wisdom from his lips. And on the other hand it is certain that "the great man," in his

[1] *E.g.*, *Victor Hugo et son temps*, by A. Barbou, or the *Livre d'Or* of Emile Blémont.

rôle of mediator, exposed himself to slights and affronts only more or less veiled. Though he took himself very seriously indeed, this view—as we have before observed—was not shared by professional politicians. There was no Republican leader—to take one example—whom Hugo desired more to conciliate and to influence than Gambetta—the most potent factor in French politics between 1877 and 1880. But Gambetta, according to common report, was far from reciprocating these sentiments; for he treated the poet with scant courtesy, seldom accepted his invitations, and made no secret of the fact that he considered him a bore.[1] Such rebuffs, perceived or not, are doubtless a common experience of all who seek to play Providence in affairs of State: he who is revered by some as the Grand Justiciar is sure to be laughed at by others as the Great Panjandrum.

Hugo was on safer ground when he turned again from the affairs of France to the affairs of the world, and resumed his familiar denunciations of the oppressors of humanity. It is difficult, however, to work up much interest in the writings of this period, mostly concerned with the old stock subjects—the iniquities of kings and priests, and—apart from poetic diction—hardly superior in tone or polemical value to the level of the professional tub-thumper. A little while ago we had *Le Pape:* now it is the turn of Royalty. From *La Pitié suprême* (February 1879) we learn that princes cannot help being bad since their education and surroundings must infallibly corrupt even the best of natures; and so, though they are the supreme criminals, they deserve the supreme pity. *Religion et Religions* (April 1880), as might be inferred from its title, proclaims the merits of our old friend "Natural Religion" as against the

[1] "The old *bondieusard*," Gambetta is reported to have said one day to a friend, "is always worrying me to go to his house; only to-day I have had another invitation to dinner, sent me by his cook"—this being an elegant reference to Mme. Drouet.

various cults and dogmas which are perversions of it, and the worst of which by far is the Roman Catholic form of Christianity. At the same time, with a prodigality of emphasis, Hugo announces his belief in God in the oft-quoted line :

Il est ! il est ! il est ! il est éperdument.

And just as natural instinct supplies a better religion than the inventions of Man, so natural ignorance—or simplicity—is to be preferred to the laborious erudition of scholars : at least, that is the apparent moral of *L'Ane* (October 1880), in which a learned donkey holds forth to the philosopher Kant on the vanity of books and libraries and knowledge in general. The donkey's name is " Patience," though that quality seems rather to have belonged to the philosopher, who listens meekly to an interminable harangue full of names the most unheard of. It is difficult to see what Hugo was driving at, for it was not his way to depreciate learning and science, to the advance of which he looked for the betterment of human life ; nor again was the age he lived in at all given either to pedantry or to false affectation of knowledge. So that perhaps M. Biré is right when he suggests that *L'Ane* is to be regarded as a *tour de force* in which the poet amused himself by displaying his own erudition and his ingenuity at making rhymes out of the most unpromising words.

From these rather heavy works it is a relief to turn to the greater variety of *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit* (May 1881), under which fanciful title Hugo indicates the four divisions of the book—Satire, Drama, Lyric and Epic Poetry. The contents of the first are chiefly personal, the poet representing himself as the champion of freedom and light, and therefore hated by the friends of darkness, the priests, or *bonzes*, as for greater contumely he delights to call them ; for the same reason calumniated by evil critics—Planche, Nisard, Veuillot—whose offence in attacking him is likened not obscurely

to the sin of sacrilege against God. The dramatic section consists of two stories or parables, one of which stands for comedy and the other for drama; the lyric, of pieces written at various times, some as far back as 1835. The epic portion is formed by one poem, a vision of the Revolution, in which the statues of Henri IV., Louis XIII., and Louis XIV., roused by a warning voice, make their way together to the Place de la Révolution, where they arrive in time to see their sins visited upon their hapless descendant Louis XVI.

To complete the list of works published in the poets' lifetime we have to add *Torquemada* (1882), and the third series of *La Légende des Siècles* (1883). The former of these is interesting both as being the only drama written by Hugo since, with the failure of *Les Burgraves,* he gave up dramatic authorship; and also because of the powerful character-study it affords of the Chief of the Spanish Inquisition—Torquemada, the sincere bigot, who sacrifices men's bodies to save their souls and even sends to the stake the two young creatures who had formerly saved his life, because in rescuing him they had committed the sacrilege of using an old cross to wrench away the stone which closed his prison. The third series of *La Légende* adheres even less than the second to the original scheme, and most of its contents would pass as well under any other title; but its most elaborate and poignant piece, the *Vision de Dante,* may perhaps claim a rightful part in the conception of "the Legend."

CHAPTER XXI

1882–1885

The last years : Death of Mme. Drouet : Demonstrations of homage to Hugo : Final illness : Death : Burial in the Panthéon

We have completed our list of Victor Hugo's publications ; it was not, of course, to be expected that the last of them would be the best, or that the chorus of approbation should be quite without jarring notes ; indeed, after the poet's death, as well as during his lifetime, there have been critics who have disputed his supremacy with a violence which was doubtless the more extreme because his position in the world of letters—alike in France and in Europe generally—was so unique and so widely acknowledged. Tennyson, as all the world knows, saluted him as " Victor in drama, Victor in romance," and Swinburne's eulogies are as numerous as they are enthusiastic ; but, on the other hand, a collection of *jugements fantaisistes*, compiled by M. Tristan Legay, shows what extravagant shapes the depreciation of rivals, overshadowed by the Master's towering figure, sometimes took. Taine is said to have compared him to " a delirious National Guard " ; " Homais at Patmos " is a description attributed to the famous Catholic pamphleteer Louis Veuillot, to whom Leconte de Lisle is reported to have responded, " bête comme l'Himalaya " ; while an anonymous journalist summed him up in the stinging epigram : " One may fairly say that Victor Hugo was the greatest poet and thinker of his century—provided that one is prepared to go on and say that Jules Verne was its greatest man

of science." Such were a few of the shafts aimed at his renown: one hardly knows whether they were sober judgments or were inspired by jealousy and malice; but the general view was, and still is, that the glory of Victor Hugo was a part of the glory of France—that there had been nothing like it in France since the glory of Voltaire—and that it behoved the poet's countrymen to make as much of him as possible. So the process of "apotheosis" continued: every possible occasion was seized for paying a formal and national tribute of homage; and Mme. Richard Lesclide, to whom we owe our most intimate record of Hugo's last years, chronicles a long list of what she calls *anniversaires glorieux*.

The most notable of the festivals was that held (February 27, 1881) to celebrate the poet's entry into his eightieth year, no literary manifestation on so imposing a scale having been attempted since the triumphant reception of Voltaire when that philosopher left Ferney to pay his final and fatal visit to Paris in 1778. No fewer than seven hundred thousand persons, of both sexes and all ages, are computed to have taken part in the *fête;* they were not all French—for various foreign admirers had sent deputations to do honour to a man of genius whose fame was cosmopolitan; and it took them from eleven o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the evening to defile before the poet's house. The City of Paris had decorated the Avenue d'Eylau with flags and flowers, and the Société des Gens de Lettres offered a laurel—no mere wreath of laurel, but a complete tree, ten feet high, and gilded from leaves to root: it was planted in the Master's garden, and was still growing there—vigorous and full of sap—at the time of his death. The procession of honour was headed by a massed band of five thousand performers, contributed by the four hundred musical societies of Paris; there was a further musical celebration in honour of the anniversary at the Trocadéro, under

the presidency of Louis Blanc, and a revival at the Gaîté Theatre of *Lucrèce Borgia*, which had not been seen on the boards for the last ten years. Moreover, there was a deputation of children carrying a banner inscribed "L'art d'être Grand-père," introduced by Catulle Mendès, upon whom Hugo bestowed a formal benediction, and an address from the Paris Conseil Municipal, to whom the Master read the speech which he had prepared:

"I salute Paris. I salute that immense City—not in my own name, for I am nothing, but in the name of whatsoever lives, reasons, hopes, and thinks on earth.

"Cities are blessed places; they are the workshops in which the divine work is done. The work of God is also the work of man. It remains human work as long as it remains individual. As soon as it becomes collective—as soon as it aims at an object which is greater than the worker—it becomes divine. The work of the cities is divine, while the labour of the fields is human. From time to time history sets a mark upon a city, and that mark is unique. History, in the course of four thousand years, has thus marked three cities, which sum up the total effort of our civilisation. What Athens was for Greek antiquity—what Rome was for Roman antiquity—that Paris is to-day for Europe, for America, for the entire civilised world. Paris is the City—Paris is the World. He who speaks to Paris speaks to the world—*Urbi et Orbi.*

"And therefore I, the humble passer-by, who have only my share in that which belongs to all, in the name of the cities—in the name of all the cities of Europe, America, and the civilised world, from Athens to New York, and from London to Moscow, in your name, Rome, and in your name, Berlin—I glorify with my affection, and I salute, the sacred City of Paris."

An eloquent utterance well worthy of the great occasion. Though it may seem over-emphatic, flowery, and high-flown to readers who come to it in cold blood,

with neither flags nor music to stir their pulses, it produced at its hour all the effect which it was intended to produce, as is attested by the Press of the time, and notably by the glowing leading article in which M. Camille Pelletan summed up the impressions of the day.

"What triumph," the animated journalist exclaimed, "has ever had such significance as that? A procession, not of captives, but of Frenchmen delivered from the captivity of kings! On the triumphal arch the list, not of pillaged towns, but of masterpieces! To Rome belong the Festivals of Brute Force; to Paris the Festivals of the Idea. What a lesson for a nation is such a spectacle! What instruction it affords to the children who brought their floral tributes! They have been the witnesses of what is assuredly the greatest honour that a great man can dream of. And how has that honour been achieved? In the first instance by thought—by poetry, which is the greatest thing in the world. It is to the dazzling genius which, beyond all others, has rendered human emotions, passions, and sorrows—all the immensity of Nature and all the profundity of pity—it is to this great genius that a nation pays the homage which a Cæsar might have envied. But that is not all. One salutes in him the victim of the evil days, the proscript of despots, the denouncer of massacre. The *fête* of Victor Hugo is the religion of true glory putting to shame the base idolatry of success."

That, too, was eloquent—involving, perhaps, ignorance or forgetfulness of some incidents which it has been necessary to relate in the course of this biography, but nevertheless true in the main; for no great man is ever quite consistent, and the goal and tendency of a life count for more than its little details. The case is one in which, at the end, we may fairly forget some of the incongruities of the beginning, and write: *Finis coronat opus.*

But now we have to turn aside from the story of these

tributes of public enthusiasm and speak of the last sorrow which was destined to sadden the Master's closing years. The health of Mme. Drouet, so long Hugo's faithful friend and companion, had begun to fail. She lived long enough to see the publication of *Torquemada ;* and she made her last public appearance at a performance (November 25, 1882) of *Le Roi s'amuse* —the piece which the censorship of Charles X. had forbidden rather more than fifty years before. The poet and his party—including Mme. Drouet and his two grandchildren—were photographed in their box in the course of the evening, little Jeanne on the knees of Auguste Vacquerie ; and *Le Monde Illustré* devoted all its space that week to pictures of the remarkable revival. "Mme. Drouet," writes Mme. Richard Lesclide, "with her heavy coronet of white hair, and her face as pale as marble, reminded one irresistibly of Pradier's Lille statue." The evening closed with a demonstration, but of an exceptionally quiet character : "Between the Acts"—we are again quoting Mme. Richard Lesclide—"there was a continual procession of friends and admirers, who came to shake the Master's glorious hands. Outside, the crowd was waiting for him. It offered him a discreet ovation, solemn and silent. Every head was uncovered ; and a compact double row of admirers in evening dress bowed respectfully as he passed between them." And, a few days afterwards, Mme. Drouet admitted that she was ill and took to her bed. It was discovered that she had cancer of the stomach, in a form beyond the operative skill of the surgeons of the time, and could at most only hope to live for a short time. Hugo, it is said, was not allowed to know that she was suffering from an incurable malady. "For him," wrote one of his *entourage*, "his friend is not seriously ill, but only slightly indisposed" ; but the end nevertheless came on May 11, 1883. "The dead," said the poet, making his effort, "are not absent, but invisible."

The union, of course, had long been consecrated by time, and there were no longer any who looked askance at it: there had been infidelities, as we know, on Hugo's part; but we also know that he had been "faithful in his fashion," as might be proved, if the proof were needed, from the last entry in the *Livre de l'Anniversaire.* "This book," the poet then wrote, "contains your life and mine. When I write in it, it seems to me that I am adding sanctity to our hours of love and eternity to our spell of time. God sees us and blesses us—I feel sure of that. One would say, in this glorious weather, that the sun wants to be of our party, and that a great festival in heaven above corresponds with our humble festival below. 'I love you'—that is the great word. God said it at the creation and it is echoed by all created things. I love you, my angel, whom I adore. Let us commence our fiftieth year together with this divine saying: 'I love you.'" It is clear from that that the course of their love ran smoothly at the last, even if it had not always done so; and it seems quite natural that M. Jules Claretie should have written in his weekly *chronique* in *Le Temps:* "The white-haired woman whom we have lost will be inseparably associated in literary annals with the imperishable memory of Victor Hugo. There is a majestic dignity in the figure which she presents to us."

The loss made a great void in the poet's life; but his relatives and friends—the public helping—did their best to prevent him from feeling the burden of his solitude. His daughter-in-law, Madame Lockroy, undertook the management of his house, and made it her special care to shield him from the fatiguing and intrusive attentions of tactless admirers of either sex: those who were now admitted to the privilege of his society constitued, as Mme. Richard Lesclide puts it, "a chosen guard of honour," and "no letters from women were any longer allowed to reach their destination in the Avenue Victor Hugo." In the summer of

the same year (1883) Hugo took a long holiday in the Alps, but he "returned to Paris in a very gloomy frame of mind," and it soon became visible to all that his age was beginning to tell on him. He caught frequent colds—the result, no doubt, of his obstinate habit of riding in omnibuses in all weathers—and it was very difficult to induce him either to consult a doctor or to take a domestic medicine: he had no great belief in physicians, and it may be that he no longer cared to live. He suffered sometimes from insomnia, and sometimes from a kind of torpor—falling asleep in his arm-chair immediately after dinner. "I am ready," he said from time to time, alluding to the probable imminence of the end, and adding: "*Dei voluntate.*"

There was still, however, before the end came, to be yet another great festival in the poet's honour: the celebration of his eighty-third and last birthday (February 26, 1885), with every kind of compliment and distinction which enthusiasm could devise. Catulle Mendès had prepared for the occasion an album containing the autographs and the expressions of homage of the leading figures in art and literature in all the countries in Europe; and a great banquet was given at the Hôtel Continental to celebrate the issue of the National Edition of his collected works—an edition designed to extend to forty volumes, and to contain etchings from original designs by fifty-seven of the chief French painters of the day, together with 2500 ordinary illustrations. Among those who were present at the banquet were included Louis Boulanger, José-Maria de Hérédia, Arsène Houssaye, Jules Claretie, Catulle Mendès, Théodore de Banville, Leconte de Lisle, and Mounet-Sully; the last named reciting the verses which Arsène Houssaye had written for the occasion. But Hugo could make no speech, and had to retire as early as nine o'clock. "These *fêtes* are not for a man of my age," he said; and a letter written by Richard Lesclide expressed the fear of "some in-

visible hand knocking at his door." He brightened a little on the following day, when a crowd of some ten thousand persons assembled before his door to salute him: he came out to shake hands with as many of his admirers as possible—including several working men in their blue blouses; and he addressed the rest in a brief speech delivered from an upper window. It seemed that he had got through the excitement without undue fatigue; but that, nevertheless, was his last effort, and less than three months were to elapse before his last illness was to overtake him.

His last small dinner-party to a few intimate friends was given on May 13 of the same year: he seemed well, and even gay, though he complained of one of his bad colds: he told Richard Lesclide that he felt "as well as one can expect at my age"; and when his secretary remarked that the weather was cold for the time of the year, he responded that the weather "is in other hands than ours." He was still up, the next day, but had to leave the table and go to bed; and on the 15th he had to send word that he was too unwell to keep an engagement to dine with his old friend Schoelcher: his doctor—Dr. Allix—was already in attendance, and had called in Doctors See and Vulpian for a consultation. "His illness," says Mme. Richard Lesclide, "passed through various phases. Alternate improvements and relapses disconcerted all prognostications. On the Saturday evening his intimates left the family in tears; on the Sunday they lunched with the children and found them smiling. It seemed that the disease had been mastered; the grand old man's breathing was easier; we were full of hope. The poet had such a splendid constitution that he seemed likely to win through once more."

But all these hopes were illusory; for the disease was pneumonia, against which it is very hard for an octogenarian to fight, however vigorous his constitution. There was yet another relapse: the doctors

announced that they were obliged to abandon hope—that their skill could do nothing except calm the agony and appease the violence of the struggle. It was not only a fight for life, but a fight for breath. At times the dying poet struggled with his attendants; and once, after the application of a blister, he pushed his physician aside with the force which fever gives, sprang out of bed, and rushed up and down the room, clutching at the furniture, and throwing up his arms; but then they injected morphia, and kept him as constantly as possible under its influence. During an interval in which the influence of the drug relaxed, he sat up and hoarsely roared out a line of verse: *C'est ici le combat du jour et de la nuit:* then he uttered his one complaint—"Ah me! How long death is in coming!" Then he reached out his hand to his grand-daughter, murmuring, "Good-bye, Jeanne, good-bye"; and the rest was coma, until they found that the beating of his heart had ceased, and they were free to close his eyes and weep for him.

All Paris, all France—and one may even say all Europe—had shared the fears, and now shared the grief, of the family and friends: even dignitaries of the Church showed a disposition to forgive, or forget, the anti-clericalism which had denounced the Pope as a "sinister old man." The Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, though himself hardly convalescent from a serious illness, wrote offering to bring the dying poet "the succour and consolation so much needed in these cruel ordeals"; but Mme. Lockroy, while thanking him for his sympathy, declined his offer, writing: "As regards M. Victor Hugo, he has again said, within the last few days, that he had no wish, during his illness, to be attended by a priest of any persuasion. We should be wanting in our duty if we did not respect his resolution"; which resolution may be said to have been set forth in an unsealed memorandum which Hugo had placed in the care of his friend Auguste Vacquerie: "I

give 50,000 francs to the poor. I wish to be carried to the cemetery in their hearse. I refuse the prayers of all churches; I ask for a prayer from all souls. I believe in God.—Victor Hugo." And now the hour for the execution of these last wishes had sounded; and they were to be executed with solemn pomp, amid the tears of a nation, but with none but a secular ceremonial.

All the French newspapers—and most of the foreign newspapers as well—made the announcement of the death with the customary marks of mourning; while the people assembled in their multitudes to pay their tribute. For a whole week the avenue was compact with the crowd of sympathisers who desired to sign their names—and the names of friends who lived in the provinces and abroad—in the book provided for the purpose: they had to stand *en queue* and await their turns as at the door of a theatre; the police had to attend to keep a track clear for the traffic, and the total number of signatures received was more than half a million. The wreaths too were more than could be counted: there was only space for a few of them in the death-chamber, and the rest filled, not only the house, but also the garden; the English sympathisers who sent such floral tributes including Tennyson, Browning, Sir Frederick Leighton, Sir F. Burton, Director of the National Gallery, and Archdeacon Farrar, who paid his homage "in honour of one who honoured man as man." And meanwhile, in the Chamber of Deputies, Floquet had eulogised the poet as "a hero of humanity who, for sixty years, had been the champion of the poor, the weak, the humble, the woman and the child," and as "the advocate of inviolable respect for life, and of mercy to those who had gone astray"; and M. Henri Brisson had proposed a resolution—adopted by 415 votes to 3—that the funeral should be a public one, conducted at the public cost.

"What man of our time," he asked, "is not indebted to him? Our democracy laments his loss. He has

sung all its grandeurs ; he has wept over all its miseries. The weak and lowly cherished and venerated his name. They knew that this great man had their cause in his heart. It is a whole people that will follow him to the grave."

So the dramatic details of the last pomp were arranged. The body was removed to the Arc de Triomphe, whither the flowers—no fewer than twelve waggon-loads of flowers—had already been taken ; and though the procession was not to start until eleven, the crowd was already dense at six, and had indeed been considerable throughout the night. At last the hour arrived for the departure. The orations were delivered ; the drums rolled ; the great guns of Mont Valérien boomed out the farewell salute ; the band of the Garde Républicaine struck up the *Marseillaise,* followed by Chopin's *Funeral March,* the *Chant du Départ,* and *Mourir pour la patrie.* "To the sovereign poet," said Emile Augier, who had been commissioned to speak on behalf of the Academy, "France renders sovereign honours. She is not prodigal of the surname Great. Hitherto it has been almost the exclusive appanage of conquerors ; but one preceding poet was universally called the Great Corneille, and henceforth we shall say the Great Victor Hugo. His long-acquired renown is now called glory, and posterity commences. We are not celebrating a funeral but a coronation." And so the march began along the Great Boulevards, packed with no fewer than a million spectators.

"The procession," wrote the correspondent of the *Daily News,* "had for vanguard a squadron of mounted gendarmes, followed by General Saussier, the Governor of Paris, and the Cuirassiers, with band playing ; twelve crown-laden cars, the band of the Republican Guard, the delegates of Besançon carrying a white crown, the French and foreign journalists, the Society of Dramatic Authors, and the delegates of the National and other theatres. The cars were surrounded by the children of

the school battalion. There was no crown on the pauper's hearse. The friends of the deceased held the cords of the pall, and Georges Hugo walked alone, behind. . . . His mother, sister, and different ladies and other friends of the family walked at a short distance behind him. The crowd of people was astounding round the Arc de Triomphe, and in the Champs-Elysées side-ways, the windows, balconies, house-roofs, and even the chimney-tops were crowded."

And the grave in which they left him alone with his glory was in the Panthéon—secularised for the occasion by Parliamentary Act: the national Valhalla over whose portal is inscribed that memorable welcome to the illustrious dead:

Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante.

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